

JAXFAX[®] Travel Marketing MAGAZINE

JUNE 2008

The Travel Agents' Path to Profits

A woman in traditional Maasai attire, including a pink skirt and a blue top, is captured in mid-air during a dance performance. She is holding a long wooden staff. In the background, a group of other Maasai people are standing and watching. The setting is a savanna landscape with acacia trees and a blue sky with scattered clouds.

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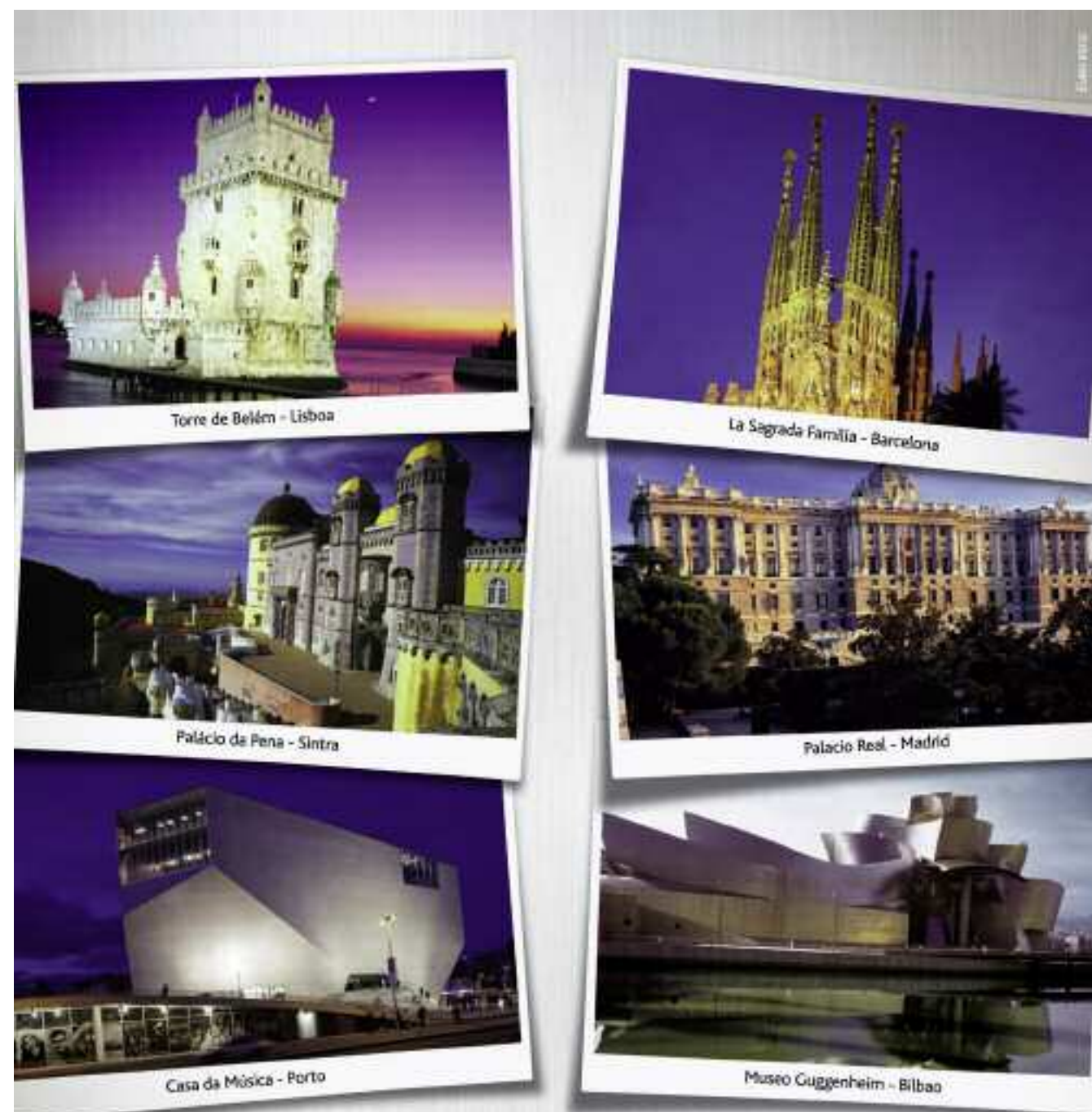


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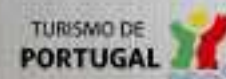
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As I scanned the vastness of the East African horizon, memories of summer camp flooded into my mind. "Going on a squeegee hunt!" I could hear my counselor chanting, her hands beating a slow marching cadence on her thighs. "Gonna catch a big one. I'm not afraid." The children's song, complete with hand gestures and sound effects, no doubt was inspired right where I stood – on a safari in Kenya. If we'd...

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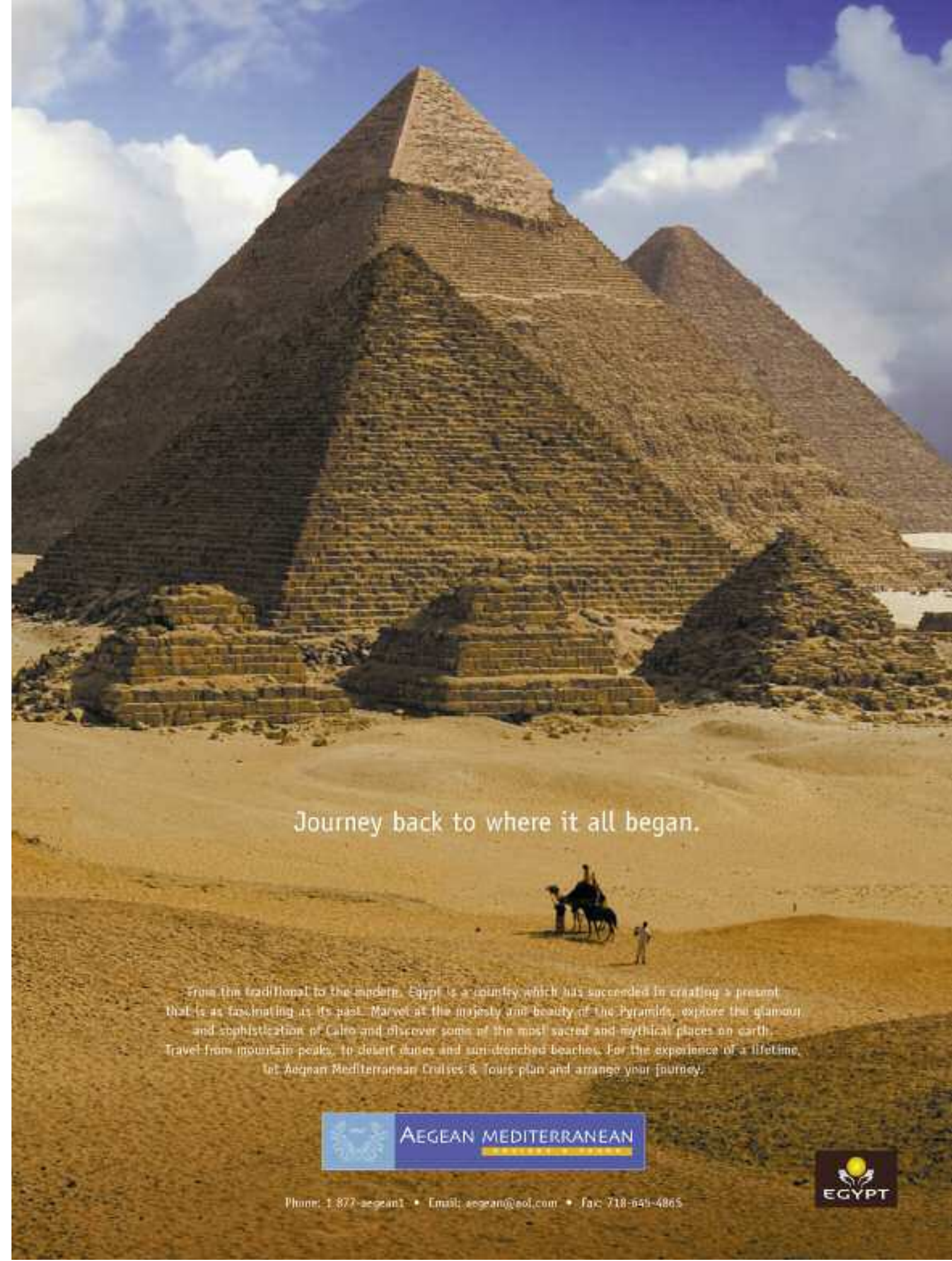
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JAX FAX Magazine's Dynamic Evolution: 37th Anniversary

JAX FAX Travel Marketing Magazine has been committed to a single mission for 37 years: to provide our travel agent readers with information essential to selling travel to your clients as profitably as possible.

During this time, we have sought to make our magazine as easy to use as possible so you can access the travel products your clients need quickly. Our editorial is written to provide the information necessary to persuade your clients to visit a destination as well as the necessary logistics: how to get there, where to stay, how to get around and what to see.

Every design aspect has been added or deleted to further assist agents including the perfect binding that provides an instant idea view of which destinations are featured in the most depth.

Likewise, our "Best Buys" are edited so you can scan the page and find basic product information including: destination, price, hotel, tours, inclusions and booking contact. Additionally, we try to survey the agent incentives that cross our threshold monthly to further boost your commission levels on all travel products.

Our Listings of tour packages and consolidator airfares are designed to familiarize you with the suppliers that service specific destinations along with price, schedule, validity period and booking contact. The Listings' format has changed very little over the years, but their positioning has.

Two Magazines in One

Unlike other trade magazines that carry only Editorial content, JAX FAX distinguishes itself as a reference tool in addition to providing excellent editorial content. For many years, the editorial and listings were presented together in geographic order. About eight years ago, we separated the editorial content from the listings to effectively create two publications within one cover.

Last year, we flipped the listings pages over, which appeared as two magazines bound together back to back. This met with mixed reviews and after one year we decided to return to our original format. However, we still wanted to find a way to emphasize the two aspects of the magazine.

Introducing the Tabbed Insert

Starting with this issue, the "listings" section of JAX FAX will now be just a finger-flip away because of our new tabbed insert. Much like the Hotel and Travel Index, which most agents are familiar with, our fold out tab will allow you to flip open to the reference section of the magazine. Immediately following the tab, you will find the Index Page listing most of the countries in the world with the corresponding page numbers for the respective air and/or tour listings. This new feature will not only serve to separate the two aspects of the magazine, but will serve to help agents more quickly find the information needed for their clients.

What's in a name?

People often ask about the origins of our name, JAX FAX. When our company – JAX (Jet Airtransport Exchange Inc.) – was established, the business model was a database of worldwide charter flights and an 800 number that travel agents could call to find out who was operating a charter from point A to B. Within a year, agents requested "print-outs" of the charter listings, which eventually led us to developing a monthly hard copy publication that incorporated its roots – JAX FAX Travel Marketing Magazine – with the dynamic evolution we have since followed.

The "FAX" is a play on the word "facts" because that is what it was providing, facts about worldwide charters. Over the years the magazine has changed drastically and evolved into "The Travel Agents' Path to Profits" it is today.

Doug Cooke, Publisher



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Enlightening Our Leaders

Next time you feel helpless, dismissed, disrespected and ignored take a visit to the **Travel Industry Association (TIA)** website, www.PowerofTravel.org. Here, you will find the latest available data about the economic impact of travel in an easy-to-navigate format that enables you to see the benefits of travel from the international level down to individual congressional districts.

"It is surprising to find how many policymakers are not fully aware of the power of travel in their own districts," said Roger Dow, President and CEO of TIA. "It is our responsibility to help America's leaders understand that travel is a vital economic engine that powers job creation and growth."

Travel is one of America's largest exports and is one of the largest employers in every state and congressional district—it is among the top 10 industries in 49 of the 50 United States. Travel and related services account for one out of every eight non-farm U.S. jobs, \$1.6 trillion in economic activity or nearly three percent of U.S. gross domestic product (GDP).

All of these facts add up to more startling information regarding the **Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI)** that would finally require a sustained communications campaign to explain changing travel document require-

ments for visitors entering the United States by land or sea, with particular emphasis on the U.S.-Canada border.

"The confusion and frustration that the impending implementation of the WHTI has created for American and Canadian travelers should serve as a lesson for the entire United States government," said Dow. With the introduction of all new security procedures, communication is as important as the policy itself.

More than 40 million Canadians visit the United States annually. Even a five percent drop in Canadian arrivals could cost the U.S. economy more than \$700 million.

The Travel Promotion Act would establish a public-private promotion campaign - at no cost to the American taxpayer - to communicate complex travel policies and assure international travelers that the U.S. is both secure and welcoming. Dow also urged the Senate to reduce congestion at land, air and sea ports-of-entry prior to the summer travel season.

"A busy summer travel season, coupled with increased identity requirements at border crossings, is a recipe for long delays, frustrated travelers and a loss of billions of dollars to the American economy unless there are sufficient border inspectors to keep trade and travel flowing smoothly," said Dow. Let's hope someone is listening.

Maria Lisella, Editor

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Snapshots

THE MONTH IN REVIEW



Maxim Voloshyn, VP Intl. Sales

Aerosvit Flying Nonstop for Five Years

AeroSvit expanded its services to New York on March 30, 2003, creating its premier non-stop flight from Kyiv to New York's JFK airport. Since 2003, the number of flights and passengers on this route has increased by 150%. The AeroSvit's flight frequency on this route increased from two weekly flights in 2003 to five weekly flights in 2008. In the past 5 years, the airline has flown over 350,000 passengers across the Atlantic. Visit www.aerosvit.com

A DATE in Punta Cana

During the 2008 DATE conference in Punta Cana, the Dominican Republic, more than 30 agents participated in an agency preview of the new Westin Roco Ki Beach & Golf Resort, to open Spring, 2009.



From left to right are Bill Herberston (Conquest), Francisco Blanch (Account Director, Starwood Caribbean Collection), Pam Bassett (Conquest), and Dave Krech (Director of Sales & Marketing, The Westin Roco Ki Beach & Golf Resort). Other guests represented Expedia, Apple Vacations, Mark Travel, Travelocity, Liberty Tours, GoGo World-wide Vacations, and Westjet Vacations.

Grand Opening of Sandos Riviera Playacar

Sandos Hotels & Resorts has expanded its portfolio of value-added properties on the Riviera Maya, Mexico, with the addition of the all-inclusive Sandos Playacar Riviera Hotel & Spa. The hotel officially opened on April 22, with a special ribbon-cutting ceremony where Sandos officials, members of the press, and tour operators were in attendance. Shown at right: Jacques De Paep, Sales and Marketing Manager for The Americas for Sandos Resorts.

Visit www.sandoshotels.com



PATA Celebrates with Hainan

New York PATA's recent Dinner Presentation was hosted by Hainan Airlines, the fourth largest carrier in China, which is starting new non-stop service from Seattle to Beijing, four times weekly.

From left to right are: Simone Basous, NY PATA; Kirti Surendran, Hainan Airlines, NYC; Jack Maraffi, Chairman of NY PATA; and Juliette Feffer, Pro-Travel, New York.

For more information on the Pacific Asia Travel Association, visit www.pata-ny.org; for information on Hainan, visit www.hnair.com



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KENYAS NTO

Tracking Down the Big Five in Style

By Susan McKee

As I scanned the vastness of the East African horizon, memories of summer camp flooded into my mind. "Going on a squeegee hunt!" I could hear my counselor chanting, her hands beating a slow marching cadence on her thighs. "Gonna catch a big one. I'm not afraid."

The children's song, complete with hand gestures and sound effects, no doubt was inspired right where I stood – on a safari in Kenya. If we'd been on foot instead of cosseted in a Land Rover, perhaps we, too, would have been "going on a hunt," rustling through waist-high grass and climbing the occasional acacia tree for a better view.

Like the colonial trophy-seeking hunters of the 19th century, we were stalking the "Big Five," searching the savannah for



Chetah ... thinking about lunch!

KENYA NTO

elephant, rhinoceros, leopard, lion and buffalo. But, instead of guns, we intended only capture by camera.

During my week, we must have seen several hundred elephants, thousands of buffalo, a dozen rhinos and a half-dozen lions, but we never caught sight of a leopard. Instead, we followed herds of wildebeest and gazelles, compared the stripes on two different

species of zebra, and used a spotlight to see the small mammals that came out after dark. All the while, we hoped the vultures circling overhead weren't waiting for us!

Close Encounters with Wildlife

There are two ways to head out to see wildlife in Kenya. The usual way is to book passage with a company specializing in exploring the vast government game preserves, where wildlife roams unfettered, attracting tourists by the busload. Of course, that's the problem – one van driver spots a lion, and suddenly 15 more vehicles will converge on the spot.

The second way is to spend time in one or more of the privately-owned game preserves. Access is controlled, and there are no government-imposed rules about driving off the marked roads or looking for game after dark.



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Here, safari “sundowners” are routine: guests enjoy cocktails out on the savannah as the sun sets, and then use a spotlight on the van on the way back to camp to look for the animals that have come out only after dark.

Each has its advantages and drawbacks, and each appeals to a different type of client. The first is, of course, more controlled. Accommodations are booked at resorts with swimming pools, three-star chefs preparing lavish buffets and reliable WIFI access. There are choices of activities for each day. Professional staff take care of guests’ needs to make sure the wildlife stays outside the complex and in the wild. This package is perfect for first-time visitors or someone skittish about traveling in Africa.

The second, such as **Jax Fax’s** tour with **Gamewatchers Safaris**, is almost as luxurious, but the accommodations are tents (albeit with indoor plumbing). Electricity is generated by solar cells. Neither the meals nor the activities offer choices, because the number of guests is kept small.

Visitors are, however, much closer to the action. Animals roam through the campsites at night – and sometimes during the day. (I had a visit inside my tent one morning from a small green frog.) The native staff mingles with the guests, giving a glimpse into the changing Kenyan tribal life. Our Masai guides – fluent in English — wore cell phones clipped to the belts holding their traditional red plaid robes in place.

In fact, cell phone service was available everywhere we went, except for one camp down in a valley. There, a bench next to a tree at the top of a rise just outside the complex was dubbed the phone booth – it was the closest spot with good reception.



SUSAN MCKEE



From left: Masai near Amboseli. Masai masks

SUSAN MCKEE

My trip to Kenya began at **Amboseli Porini Camp** in the Selenkay Conservancy. In the East African language of Swahili, “porini” means bush – as in land remote from urban areas covered with dense vegetation.

To get there, we drove down the congested, bumpy Mombasa Road that connects the port city of Mombasa with Kenya’s capital of Nairobi. Much of the highway is under construction – it should be smooth sailing when it’s finished. On the portions already completed, there’s even a shoulder wide enough for bicycles.

Communal Conservation Efforts

The Amboseli region, in the country’s southeast, is often lush and green due to the water runoff from Mount Kilimanjaro (across the border in Tanzania). Still, periodic drought affects this area as well. Because wildlife is better adapted to survival than livestock, the native Masai entered into an agreement with the

Selenkay Conservancy to limit grazing.

“The Masai are not bush meat eaters, so they are proud to live together with wildlife,” notes the warden, David Kitasho. “Since we started the project, things have changed for the better. The grass has returned, along with native trees and bushes.”

The conservancy built waterholes for livestock and primary schools for the Selenkay Group Ranch residents. Of the 183,000 acres in the ranch (communally owned by the Masai), about 12,400 are set aside for the conservancy area. “We’ve benefitted from the partnership,” Kitasho says. “This model is a good example for other Masai.”

Out on the plains there’s plenty of “nature raw in tooth and claw.” Protected from the predations of humankind, animals are free to play out their preordained roles in the food chain. Large herds of ungulates – impalas, waterbucks, gazelles,

antelopes, wildebeest, zebras — are just dinner-on-the-hoof for the carnivorous predators. The massive herbivores – rhinos, hippos, elephants – graze undisturbed. There are wary groups of warthogs, occasional flocks of exotic birds, herds of graceful giraffe, and occasional sightings of the skittish dik-diks, a species of antelope about the size of a small dog.

The mix of animals changed as we moved from Amboseli to the **OI Pejeta Conservancy**. Richard Bigne, conservancy director, said that the project near Mount Kenya was commercial – its purpose was to make a profit. “But,” he added, “the money is reinvested in conservation efforts.”

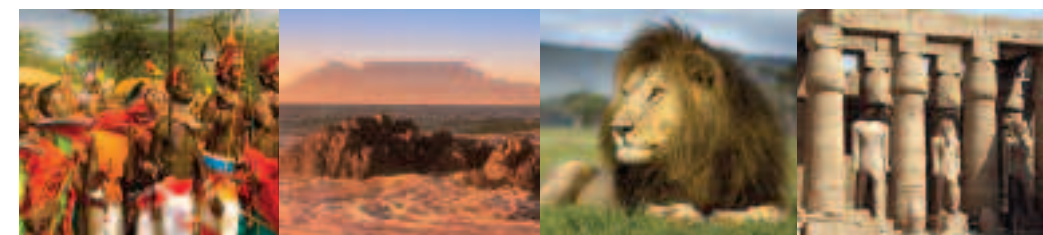
This area of Kenya used to be overgrazed by cattle production, and periodic drought cut into this previously profitable business. About 25 years ago, the conservancy started with about 19,000 acres with the goal of restoring wildlife to the area. The area has been expanded over the years. Now, its 75,000 acres are completely enclosed (the fencing electrified by solar power) — except for the wildlife corridors which are guarded 24 hours a day to keep out poachers. (It’s on a



SUSAN MCKEE

major migration route.)

OI Pejeta has some unique areas within its fences, including the largest black rhino sanctuary in East Africa counting about 75 black rhino – a protected species, and one very special tame rhino, a “retired performer” who doesn’t mind being pet by humans. A chimpanzee sanctuary protects animals moved to Kenya when violence erupted in their native Burundi.



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no way for the people to benefit from it. Cooperative ecotourism, he discovered, was a way to preserve the ecosystem.

Grievances-Cook is also a member of the Executive Committee and is the spokesman for the **Kenya Tourism Federation (KTF)**, the umbrella body for all the trade associations representing the tourism industry whose members include Kenya's leading tour operators, travel agents, hoteliers, air operators, and eco-tourism operators covering all of Kenya.

"Conservancies allow the owner of the land – the Masai – to gain income from wildlife and environmental conservation,"

Cell phone booth in Masai country.



Grievances-Cook reports. "We lease rather than buy, always advising the communal group ranches to hold onto their land. This is marginal land rather than good

agricultural land, and by using it for ecotourism, it can generate income.

"For the Porini Camps, we maintain a ratio of one tent (for two to four people) per 700 acres," he explains. "We don't have permanent structures or generators in our camps, and we use solar power. The objective is to make a 'light footprint' so all can be undone when we move out."

Nomadic Tourism

"The Masai is a nomadic pastoralist who just wants to look after his cows. He welcomes a partner using an ecologically sustainable model, and tourism doesn't depend on rainfall the way rearing cattle does," Grievances-Cook comments. "Wildlife is better adapted to changing climate than livestock. Lions do well during the drought. Populations of herbivores rebound when the rain returns." The bottom line? "We all benefit from responsible ecotourism."

Except for the first leg of our journey, made by van, we flew from region to region. Small planes are the fastest way to get around in a country with mostly substandard roads. Although Kenya is located on the equator, the weather on safari wasn't tropical because of the altitude. Nairobi, for example, is almost as high as Denver. Sunscreen is a must, as is a hat and mosquito repellent. Anti-malaria pills are highly recommended. Call 303-886-6953; kate@gamewatchers.co.ke; www.porini.com

Kenya Airways is the 31-year old national carrier of the Republic of Kenya offering over 30 international and regional destinations. Other carriers operate flights from New York's JFK to Nairobi include **American Airlines, British Airways, Kenya Airways, Emirates, KLM, Lufthansa, Qatar Airways** and **Virgin Atlantic**.

U.S. citizens need visas to visit Kenya either prior to departure or upon arrival. For details, download the visa form at www.kenyaembassy.com/visa.html and complete it in advance to save clients the time and hassle of doing so upon arrival. Cost per person is \$50 cash payable only in U.S. dollars.

For more information, call the Kenya Tourist Board, 866-44-KENYA; or visit: www.MagicalKenya.com

For consolidator airfares and tour packages to Kenya see page 91 of the Listings Section

Kenya Airways Recovers

Kenya Airways (KQ) told JAXFAX it was recovering passenger numbers lost during post-election chaos.

The airline saw numbers plummet when Kenya's disputed December 27 election sparked violence and instability, killing more than 1,200 people, paralyzing parts of the nation and scaring off tourists. "We have improved, but London and Amsterdam have not picked up to where we expect them to be," **Chief Executive Titus Naikuni** (right) told reporters. Naikuni said he expects tourism numbers to pick up in July when the next high season starts. He said the airline will restart its three times a week service to Paris in June. That service was cancelled in February after the French government advised against travel to Kenya. Nairobi is a major airways hub for east and central Africa. Kenya Airways is looking forward as it has just placed an order for nine Dreamliners to arrive in 2010.



JF: What distinguishes Kenya Airways?

Naikuni: What makes KQ different and unique is its growth from a loss making parastatal into a profitable and dynamic international carrier while remaining true to its African heritage. From a global perspective, KQ stands out as among the most profitable airlines in the world with a 28% return on equity. Kenya Airways is the 31-year old national carrier of the Republic of Kenya offering over 30 international and regional destinations, moving more than 2.7 million passengers annually. Through our Nairobi hub we have a network to destinations across Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Asia and the Far East. Kenya Airways flies to more than 30 African destinations including the major African capitals of Lagos, Johannesburg, Kinshasa and Cairo. Within Europe, we operate to and from three major cities, Paris, Amsterdam and London where passengers can connect from all over Europe using our code share partners **KLM** and **Air France**. KQ flies to major destinations in Asia including Dubai, Bangkok and Guangzhou.

JF: Which alliances are you in and if not, which may you be considering to join?

Naikuni: KQ carefully selects its partners. We seek to ensure that we get into partnerships that will give us a greater competitive edge, increase our revenue and grow our market share. KLM has been our strategic partner for the last 10 years.

This partnership has allowed us greater reach and helped us tap into the expansive KLM-Air France route network. Kenya Airways gained full **SkyTeam** Associate Airline Status in September 2007. The SkyTeam alliance is especially important as it will grow our corpo-

rate identity and give us greater recognition of as a world class airline. Our SkyTeam partners will benefit from our strength in Africa and we will also benefit from their strengths in Europe, Asia and South America.

JF: Can you give us an equipment update?

Naikuni: Kenya Airways boasts one of the youngest fleets on the continent. The 23 all Boeing Fleet comprises four Boeing 777s, six Boeing 767s, three Boeing 737-800s, among others. KQ received two EMBRAER 170 jets in 2007 and another one is scheduled to be delivered in the middle of this year; we will also take delivery of three Boeing 737-800s later this year. To complement this fleet, KQ has invested more than \$8.1 million in a modern state of the art hangar at its Embakasi base.

The modernization is further complemented by continuous training of staff and constant upgrades in technology and systems. At the moment, Kenya Airways has achieved 95% on e-ticketing across the network.

JF: Can you tell us of any major investments being made for future?

Naikuni: KQ has placed an order for nine Dreamliners to be received in the year 2010.

Last year, KQ also made huge investments in upgrading its airline reservation system from CORDA to ALTEA Sell. This investment in change will create seamless connectivity with our international partners and ensure maximum compatibility across various distributions systems.

Also in the year, a new learning facility named, "The Pride Centre" that cost the company \$8.1 million was opened to provide ample training for more than 4,200 staffers across the network.

The year 2008 will see the company make more investments in improving operations in the Operations control Centre (OCC) and the Hub Control Centre (HCC) at the **Jomo Kenyatta International Airport**.

JF: Where do you see KQ in the next five years?

Naikuni: The next five years will see KQ solidify its position as a major carrier in Africa by providing more linkages across African cities.

Through its partnerships and alliances with other carriers, it will also play a greater role in opening up Africa to the entire world. We hope to see the expansion and growth of Paris as another major hub for our European operations.

KQ hopes to become a major player in world travel through its partnerships with KLM, Air France and through its membership in SkyTeam.

JF: Is there any component of your company that pays agents a commission?

Naikuni: Yes, we have attractive market fares for individuals and group travel with several interline partners such as NW/KL through our Amsterdam hub and **United Airlines** and **Air Canada** through our London hub.

JF: What would be your biggest wish for the carrier's future?

Naikuni: To see Kenya Airways become a major engine for change for the growth and opening up of Africa. That means that KQ should be able to bring the world to every part and capital in Africa and the vice-versa. With the addition of 787-Dreamliners, we hope to provide airlines with unmatched fuel efficiency, resulting in exceptional environmental performance and phenomenal growth.

Call 866-536-9224; www.kenyaair.net

Eye Witness: Why Visit Kenya Now?

By Mark Laiosa

Kenya may well be facing its biggest challenge ever as recent violence caused by a tightly contested presidential race dealt Kenya's tourism industry a severe blow: surprisingly, overall, tourism in the first two months was down just a tad over 50 percent compared to the same period in 2007.

By April, a resolution was in place with the creation of a power-sharing government. Tourism, Kenya's largest industry, was on a record breaking high in late December, surpassing the million-arrivals mark for 2007. Following this success, Kenya's tourism faced what seemed to be insurmountable obstacles as badly timed as any could be. The strife struck the country while it was in the midst of improving and growing its infrastructure without putting its renowned wildlife and culture at risk.

"The strife was not near areas frequented by tourists, and we had zero tourist violence-related incidents with over 40,000 visitors on the ground during the crisis," stated Rose Kwana, Public Relations Manager for the KTB in Nairobi. A Travel Warning was issued February 8 and later lightened March 21, after a power-sharing agreement was signed on February 28 and ratified and accepted by Kenyan parliament on March 18.

As Kenya's second largest source market, the losses of arrivals from the United States, around 46 percent, deeply hurt Kenya's tourism industry. According to the Kenya Tourist Board statistics, the U.S. nudged Germany aside, slipping in to second place, behind the British.

I visited in mid-April and walked unescorted through the downtown areas

of Nairobi and the old town area of Mombassa. The streets were alive with the energy of daily life: In the Nairobi City Market, located in the central business district, produce sellers and food vendors were doing a brisk business.

Mombasa, which is set on the Indian Ocean, is Kenya's second largest city; its inhabitants are friendly sellers and creators of beaded jewelry. In both cities my American-accented questions were greeted with wide smiles and answered politely and patiently. As tourists in any city, be alert and aware of your surroundings.

Best Road to Recovery

"The strongest way to help get Kenya back on its feet is to come out on safari and experience our wonderful country. We believe the people who have already visited us will become our biggest ambassadors, as they have been for the past 50 years. By coming to Kenya, they helped us make tourism the leading sector. We expect they will help again, one safari at a time," said Dr. O'ngonga Achieng, Managing Director of the Kenya Tourism Board.

The best reason to go to Kenya now is the annual Wildebeest migration, a vast movement of animals across the plains of the Masai Mara from Tanzania into Kenya. It starts late July into August with Hundreds of thousands of wildebeests following about 500, 000 Zebras, and predators culling the herds. The experience is so incredible that **WABC's Good Morning America** called the great migration the Seventh Living Wonder of the World.

Sweet Secrets of Israel

The recent Oscar-nominated movie, "In the Valley of Elah," starring Tommy Lee Jones and Charlize Theron, may have done more for its name recognition than David's epic battle against Goliath, which raged here, but this region, flanked by the gently rolling hills of Judea, still remains one of the Holy Land's less frequented gems.

Set just 45 minutes southwest of Jerusalem, the Valley of Elah remains one of Israel's most tightly held secrets: Minutes after exiting Highway 1 linking Israel's two major cities of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, the verdant approach to the Valley of Elah gives way to secluded monasteries and vineyards where Israelis and more and more travelers come to sample the rising stars in Israeli wines. The region surrounding the Valley of Elah is one of the hotspots of Israeli viniculture. Wine exports from the country have doubled since 2001 with France the number two importer of Israeli wine after the United States.

Top 10 Israeli Vineyards

Near the gates of the Dir a-Rafat Monastery, wine fans come to taste the Moni Winery's signature Estate Reserve. This family-run operation established in 2001 and perched high above kibbutz Tzora and the larger Efrat Winery produces upwards of 40,000 bottles annually. More boutique wineries pepper the valley and Rogov's 2008 Guide to Israeli Wines ranks Ella Valley, at Kibbutz Nativ HaLamed Heh, in the top 10 of Israel's wineries. Tours here include demonstrations of the latest in winemaking technology as well as how some methods from antiquity are still practiced today.

Monks and Pottery

Nearby, down a gently winding road, Israel's first meteorological station still functions and is maintained by monks within the confines of the Beit Jamal Monastery. During visiting hours, visitors admire the remains of a mosaic from a 5th-century Byzantine church that occupied the site until the Persian invasion of 614. A more modern structure erected by Salesian monks in the 1800's stands today, as well as a second church for the 32 Sisters of Bethlehem, who are sworn to a vow of silence. This idyllic setting is often the venue for concerts and a favorite pit stop for cyclists. Even when there are no performances, the nuns wordlessly sell charming, hand-painted pottery.

Goliath's Come-Uppance

Hiking amid the remains of ancient towns like Azeka and King Hezekiah's Sokho help conjure up the epic biblical battle between David and Goliath, which the Bible tells us took place here. Ancient wine presses dot the ruins, attesting to the valley's winemaking importance over the millennia. In summer, hikers and bikers bask in the shade of forested Britannia Park and along the banks of Nahal Sorek, one of Israel's longest watercourses. When it's time to eat, a



Carmel winery in Zikhron Ya'akov

plethora of charming country restaurants serve up an array of culinary treats. One such spot, Pa'amon, is nestled among the vines of a local vineyard and offers a selection of local wines and rustic cooking. A little farther afield, off one of the back roads, Jerusalemites come for a traditional Saturday afternoon Cholent (from the French "chaud, lent," referring to its overnight recipe) at the pastoral Bar BaHar restaurant near Moshav Bar Giora. Tucked away in the Esh-taol Forest, Tavlin's menu uses herbs and spices native to the area and specializes in locally produced cheeses, and yet more boutique wines. A fragrant spice market is attached.

The Underground City of Beit Guvrin

At the southern end of Route 38, which leads from the main Jerusalem-Tel Aviv highway to the Valley of Elah, stands the biblical town and now national park of Beit Guvrin. Originally a Jewish settlement dating back at least 3,000 years, the sprawling city over time became home to Byzantine Christians and later Muslims. Impressive bell-shaped caves and underground chambers were hollowed by hand out of the soft chalk creating an entire underground city. In the park, which stretches over 1,000 acres, visitors clamber through the subterranean columbaria where carrier pigeons were raised, and see mosaics, ancient churches and Byzantine tombs. During Chanukah, Beit Guvrin's caves serve as a popular candle-lit venue for concerts.

Intimate Stays

The Valley of Elah is an easy daytrip from either Jerusalem or Tel Aviv - less than 45 minutes from either. Those wishing to sleep over can choose from an assortment of bed and breakfasts and even monasteries, and at Neve Shalom-Wahat A-Salam, a Jewish-Christian-Muslim community established by a Jewish-born Dominican monk from Egypt, there is a comfortable guesthouse.

Pink Floyd bassist Roger Waters played here in 2006; fans clambering to catch a glimpse of him caused one of the worst traffic jams in Israel's history.

For details on the region including accommodations and more attractions, download www.touryoav.org.il/english.pdf; For general information on Israel, visit www.goisrael.com

For consolidator airfares and tour packages to Israel
see page 88-89 of the Listings Section

IN THE NEWS

More Access to the Holy Land

Following the launch of Delta Air Lines' March 2008 new daily flights to Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport from New York JFK, several international airlines have debuted new daily flights to Israel.

British Midland (www.flybmi.com) recently began daily flights between London's Heathrow and Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion airports, with connecting flights to the U.S. and Canada on Star Alliance partner airlines.

Czech Airlines (www.czechairlines.com) will also increase its summer service from Prague to Tel Aviv from seven flights per week (in 2007) to 11 flights (in summer 2008). And the Vatican's airline, Opera Romana, is expected to debut six weekly flights from Rome and Verona to Israel, two of which will fly to Ovda Airport in the southern city of Eilat.

Best in the Middle East

Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion International Airport has been judged "best airport in the Middle East" and the "world's second best airport" that handles 5-15 million passengers a year, says Arie Sommer, Israel Tourism Commissioner for North and South America. The survey was conducted by the Geneva-based Airports Council International (ACI) whose Airport Service Quality Survey is based on the results from nearly 200,000 questionnaires completed by passengers in 2007. The survey captures the passenger's immediate appraisal of 34 airport service factors, from check-in through to departure at the gate.

Ben Gurion International Airport is served by more than 70 airlines, with as many as 130 weekly nonstop flights connecting North America to Israel and vice versa - on Air Canada, Continental, Delta, El Al and Israir.

HolyPass Opens Doors in Jerusalem's Old City

The millions of people who will visit Jerusalem's Old City this year can now save on admission to the city's most famous sites with the HolyPass. The new smart card provides access to two major sites-such as the City of David

National Park, the Jerusalem Archaeological Park and the Burnt House of Kathros-in addition to three other Old City attractions, including the Ariel Center for Jerusalem in the First Temple Period, the Ramparts Walk, the Roman Plaza and Zedekiah's Cave. The HolyPass-which costs \$25 for adults, \$13 for children and is valid for one week-is available for purchase at tourist sites throughout the Old City, and at many Jerusalem hotels; travel agents can purchase group passes (valid for 10 people) through the HolyPass website.

Visit www.holypass.co.il

Sita's Moroccan Foray

Morocco combines a fascinating culture, outdoor pursuits under the Moroccan sun and flavorful cuisine. With non-stop flights from New York to Casablanca and affordable all-inclusive packages from major tour operators, the enchanted Kingdom of Morocco, a land of legend and adventure, is easily accessible and surprisingly affordable.

Sita World Travel takes guests on a journey through some of Morocco's most captivating cities with the "Imperial Cities" luxury package. This seven- or 10-day trip departs for Casablanca every Sunday from numerous gateways. First stop on the tour is the capital city of Rabat, where attractions include the Casbah of the Oudayas and the Hassan Tower. Fès, a living Medieval city, unfolds its ancient, labyrinthine medina, with age-old handicraft souks, magnificent architecture and delicious cuisine. After crossing the Atlas Mountains through Berber villages and the town of Beni Mellal, the tour arrives in Marrakech with its famous Djemaa el Fna Square, Dar Si Said Museum, Saadien Tombs and the Menara and Agdal Gardens. Starting at \$1,295, this package includes: the option of luxury or deluxe hotels with private facilities; six to nine breakfasts, one lunch, five or nine dinners; roundtrip transfers; transport by air-conditioned vehicle with English speaking driver/guide; tours to Rabat, Meknes, Fès and Marrakech; special Moroccan dinner with folklore show; and on the 10-day version, travel by land rover over the sand dunes at Merzouga and spend a night under the stars in a Bedouin camp.

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Pan-African Safaris

Ethiopian Airlines recently launched "Ethiopian Journeys," a new collection of vacation packages showcasing the best of East Africa. The new tour packages combine the excitement of an African safari with the immense history that only the cradle of humanity can provide.

Ethiopian Journeys brings together the most awe-inspiring experiences of East Africa, packaged in tours that have been designed for U.S. travelers. All vacation packages feature Ethiopian Airlines plus hotel and land tours. Itineraries range from East Africa to UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Among the three tour packages are: The "Queen of Sheba Tour" featuring the northern historic and cultural route of Ethiopia. Highlights include Blue Nile Falls, Gondar's castles and churches, Lalibela's churches carved from solid rock, and Ethiopia's oldest city Axum.

The "Tanzanian Odyssey" features one of the finest safari experiences in all of Africa. Highlights include the expansive landscapes and wildlife of the Serengeti National Park, Mount Kilimanjaro and the Ngorongoro Crater known as the "Eden of Africa."

The "Ethiopian Tribal Discovery" tour features the southern route of Ethiopia where travelers can literally step into a looking glass into a time and culture that is supremely unique. Here travelers can discover amazing tribal communities that have seen little change over the last 1,000 years.

Call 800-445-2733; www.seeyouinethiopia.com

Untouched Botswana

"The time of not being able to confirm your clients on any trip because the minimum passenger numbers have not been met are over," says Garth Jenman, president of **Jenman African Safaris**, which is represented in the U.S. by **EZ Africa**. However, the company's 14-day Botswana Wildlife Breakaway is filling up quickly. If your clients' preferred departure dates are unavailable, he advises agents to consider the company's brand-new "Botswana Untouched Mobile Safari." Clients will explore Botswana's finest National Parks during this 14-day safari. In 4x4 vehicles, they travel from Johannesburg to spend their first night at the Limpopo River in the Tuli Block, to see white rhinos in the Khama Rhino Sanctuary and giraffe, elephant, zebra, impala, roan, sable, wildebeest, among a few, in the Savuti Game Reserve after experiencing the vastness of the Makgadikgadi Pans. They will explore the Okavango Delta in traditional dug-out canoes and enjoy the Chobe National Park's wildlife by land and on a boat cruise on the Chobe River. This is a true African wildlife adventure. Additionally, Jenman African Safaris offers camping options for more adventurous clients. A number of departures on selected tours throughout the year with guaranteed departure dates.

Call 888-219-8162; www.jenmansafaris.com/tour; other sites Jenman represents www.africanluxuryhideaways.com; www.victoriafalls.biz; www.capetownsafaris.com; www.travel2madagascar.com

African safaris are among those once in a lifetime vacation propositions that demand time and a bit more change than many other vacation options. However, with more and more packaging of safaris that take place on foot, in jeeps combined with luxury stays in lodges or tenting, the prospect of the experience delivers much more than one can imagine. Researchers say, the majority of people in the U.S. understand that in fact a memorable experience delivers more than consuming a lot of "stuff," ie, cars, toys and all the other conspicuous consumer objects.

New Links from Zambia to Tanzania

Now with direct flights between Lusaka, Zambia and Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, **Norman Carr Safaris** has teamed up with **Fumba Beach Lodge** to develop the Bush and Beach vacation package that combines a safari with unwinding at a resort. Clients will spend six nights in the unspoiled environment then head to exotic Zanzibar Island for a three-night tropical beach getaway at Fumba Beach Lodge.

The land rates start at \$4,975 per person double. Norman Carr Safaris offers guests a choice to go on safari in vehicles or the more up-close and personal option of a walking safari through the bush. The four camps have been set up so that a walk from one to the next is conducted at a non-strenuous pace with a fully-qualified guide and armed game scout. Once in Zanzibar, travelers will stay at the 26-room Fumba Beach Lodge, which lies concealed from the tourist areas, surrounded by beaches and offers spectacular diving and snorkeling. Guestrooms are scattered throughout the grounds, shaded by a forest of baobab trees and palm fronds; each suite has a private roof terrace overlooking the Indian Ocean. Rates include all inter-Africa flights, accommodation, meals, game-viewing, bar, laundry, National Park fees, taxes, transfers to/from Mfuwe Airport, guided reef dives, and village walks.

E-mail kapani@normancarrsafaris.com; or visit www.normancarrsafaris.com

U.S.-based tour operator **Ker & Downey's** roots began over four decades ago in Botswana and since then, they have grown into an award-winning force in the global travel industry. Its clientele includes celebrities and those who demand the utmost in privacy, to the family down the street who has always dreamed of the ultimate safari experience.

This 10-day private journey, **Luxury in the Bush** begins in Johannesburg with clients staying in a luxury room at the **Westcliff**. Next, it's three nights at the award-winning **Madikwe Hills** in the **Madikwe Game Reserve** where reportedly Big Five wildlife experiences are unforgettable. Next, it's three nights in luxury at **Leopard Hills** where guests are spoiled from the moment they arrive; ending with two nights at **Kings Camp**. Pricing starts at \$6,651 per person double.

Call 800-423-4236 E-mail safari@kerdowney.com; www.kerdowney.com

Among the top value packages **Karell Holidays** offers is the six-night Kenya Highlights, which has been featured in **Frommers' Budget Travel Hot Deals**. Accommodations are in the **Nairobi Safari Club**, **Samburur Lodge**, **The Ark**, **Lake Naivasha Simba Lodge** and **Mara Simba**, all of which are considered top-notch properties. Sights include **Samburu Game Reserve**, **Aberdare National Park**, **Lake Nakuru** and the **Masai Mara**.

Prices are seasonal and start at \$1,752 per person double through June 30 and again from Nov. 1-Dec. 15; and \$1,798 per person July 1-Oct. 31 for land arrangements only.

Visit www.karell.com or www.karellholidays.com

Walking safaris have always been a popular mainstay of **Mountain Travel Sobek's** offerings, as they give participants a deeper awareness of their surroundings, but of late there has been an increased surge of interest, due to adventure travelers wishing to experience the "real" Africa beyond the usual crowded game lodges and safari circuits. extra departures to existing trips. New this year on the classic **Ultimate Tanzania Safari** adventure is a three-day walking safari in the celebrated Serengeti. The 12-day program is priced at \$4,995 per person double, land-only with departures June 28, July 27, Sept. 21, and Dec. 21.

Call 888-687-6235; www.mtsobek.com

HOTEL UPDATE

The **Indigo Bay Island Resort and Spa** on Mozambique's Bazaruto Island is now welcoming guests to its new luxury spa, operated by the renowned **Sanctuary Group** from South Africa. The **Sanctuary Spa** at **Indigo Bay** is only the second of its kind in Mozambique, following the opening of The **Sanctuary Spa** at **Rani's Pemba Beach Hotel and Spa** last year. Set in southeastern Africa, Mozambique is bordered by the Indian Ocean to the east, Tanzania to the north, Malawi and Zambia to the northwest, Zimbabwe to the west and Swaziland and South Africa to the southwest.

Guests are treated to physical, mental and emotional wellbeing while enjoying the exquisite vistas of the island and 360 degree views of the Indian Ocean's indigo colored waters. www.indigobayresort.com

The spa menu at **Pemba Beach Hotel and Spa**, also managed by **The Sanctuary Spa Group**, reflects Pemba's Arabic and African influences. Specially trained therapists are on hand to exploit the natural healing and relaxation powers of geranium, snowbush, lanyana and buchu, "the African antidote to modern living."

Call 011-27 11 467 1277; fax: 011-27 11 465 9623, Email: enquiries@raniresorts.com; www.raniresorts.com

South Africa's **Pezula Resort Hotel & Spa** has added the **Pezula Private Castle** on Noetzie Beach to its portfolio of ultra-luxury accommodations at the 2,500-acre resort located on South Africa's famed Garden Route.

Says Pezula Chairman, Keith Stewart. "The Castle has a spectacular location with breathtaking views, complete privacy, five-star service and access to all Pezula's facilities and activities.

The Castle has two units - the Main Castle and the **Honeymoon Castle**, which are serviced by a team of hand-picked personnel, including a resident chef, housekeeper and butler. Menus are selected daily in consultation with the chef according to the freshest available ingredients. A fully equipped gymnasium, heated outdoor pools and thatched gazebo complete the extraordinary facilities.

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IN THE NEWS

Morocco NTO Comes Home, to the Big Apple

The Moroccan National Tourist Office celebrated its return to New York with a gala event at Midtown Loft on Fifth Avenue, under the direction of Rachid Maaninou, director North America. Abbas Azzouzi, CEO based in Rabat, delivered a presentation touting major new infrastructure developments as Morocco modernizes its tourism industry for a sustainable future. Several leading tour operators attended, pictured on the right.

Rachid Maaninou was recently named director of the Americas for the Moroccan National Tourist Office (MNT0), which has returned to New York for the first time since closing its office in late 2001. Maaninou will be responsible for building Morocco's markets in the U.S. and Latin America.

Maaninou joined MNT0 in Rabat in late 2002 as an executive in the public relations department and rose rapidly to director of international markets in February 2005. Prior to that, he held various positions with Moroccan hotels, tour operators and travel agencies following post-graduate studies in tourism and hospitality in Tangier and at the University of Toulouse. He completed his education with a degree in tourism management, and his research paper on marketing ecotourism in Morocco earned a special jury plaudit and recommendation for publication.

"The MNT0 is glad to be back in New York and I am proud to be named the first director of the Americas," said Maaninou. "We've seen remarkable growth in the number of Americans traveling to Morocco since the global travel recovery began in 2003, and it makes sense to re-establish our presence here to work more closely with the industry and the media."

Indeed, in 2007 Morocco's U.S. visitor numbers were up 14% as more Americans discovered the special allure that combines cultural richness with a diversity of landscapes in a relatively compact destination. Europeans have been flocking to Morocco for decades, drawn by its Mediterranean and Atlantic beaches, Atlas Mountains and vast Sahara Desert as well as its African-Arab-European heritage. For Americans, it's an easy destination to reach, just under seven hours flying time from New York to Casablanca, and the dollar still goes much further here than many destinations in Europe.

"Under the Vision 2010 plan, whose goal is to boost Morocco's tourism arrivals to 10 million by 2010, we have attracted a lot of investment to build new hotels, resorts and infrastructure in a carefully controlled, sustainable way. Under the strategy developed in 2003, we have been expanding our marketing efforts ever outward, and so I will also be focusing on Canada and Latin America in coming years," he added.

The first of six new generation Atlantic and Mediterranean coastal resorts will open in May 2009 in Saidia, with the last slated to open by July 2012. Bringing 130,000 new beds to the inventory, these resorts are one aspect of a multifaceted plan that is reorganizing Morocco's tourism industry while at



Robert Paris of Club ABC Tours, Abbas Azzouzi, CEO, Moroccan National Tourist Office (Rabat), Rachid Maaninou, MNT0 Director, North America, and Nikos Tsakanikas, Homeric Tours

MOROCCO NTO

the same time protecting its superb cultural and environmental assets. Under the new plan, Morocco's cities and diverse landscapes will be promoted for relaxation and escape from stress; the search for cultural authenticity; the discovery of nature and traditional lifestyles, and sports and physical adventure. New development in Morocco's cultural destinations will also add another 30,000 beds and boost inventory to 230,000 by 2010.

"Set at the crossroads of the Mediterranean, linking east and west, Africa and Europe, we are proud of our rich heritage, which we will honor and protect as we evolve to fulfill the aspirations of our visitors...we welcome you to visit and see for yourself," said Maaninou.

For more information, contact the Moroccan National T212-221-1583/1584, fax 212-221-1887; E-mail info@mnto-usa.org; www.visitmorocco.com

Customizing Small Group Safaris

From the Garden Route to the Okavango Delta and Victoria Falls, **International Expeditions'** new Inventing Southern Africa custom desk creates itineraries for travel in Botswana, Namibia, Mozambique and Zambia. For families looking to create a one-of-a-kind experience, the new Inventing Southern Africa desk customizes travel to allow for maximum flexibility.

Perfect for a family expeditions (or honeymooners, couples and small groups), however large or small, the desk can custom-tailor any journey around specific dates or events including family celebrations, birthdays, graduations and anniversaries. In addition International Expeditions arranges private trips for groups using pre-arranged transportation and accommodations.

While each Southern Africa program is crafted to accommodate personal interests, most custom itineraries range from 12 to 14 days and cost an average of \$7,500 per person, excluding international air. IE also sells itineraries to Peru, Costa Rica and Panama, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Rwanda.

Call 800-633-4734; E-mail nature@ietravel.com; www.ietravel.com/family

BEST BUYS

\$1752 **KENYA**

Karell Holidays presents 7 day/ 6 nights Kenya Highlights package, featured in Arthur Frommers Budget Travel's Hot Deals. Accommodations include one night in each of the following: Nairobi Safari Club in Nairobi, Samburu Lodge in Samburu National Reserve, The Ark in Aberdare National Park, The Lake Naivasha Simba Lodge in the Lake Nakuru Reserve and two nights in Mara Simba in the Masai Mara Game Reserve. Included are meet and greet service on arrival Nairobi, roundtrip transfers airport/hotel, 6 night accommodations, 7 Breakfasts, 5 Lunches, 5 Dinners, game drives accompanied by a professional driver/guide and inclusive of park entrance fees. International air is not included and package price is based on seasons.

Call 888-777-1046 or go to www.karellholidays.com

\$3495 **ISRAEL**

No matter the budget or special interest, **Ya'lla Tours USA** has a program to match. Two nine-day, privately escorted tours are designed to connect Jews and Christians with their spiritual and cultural roots. Magnificent Israel focuses on Jewish heritage with two nights in Tel Aviv, 2 nights in Tiberias and four nights in Jerusalem.

The Christian Journey of Faith is a spiritual pilgrimage visiting all the significant sites associated with Jesus as well as a number of Old Testament sites with one night in Tel Aviv, two nights in Tiberias and five nights in Jerusalem. Both tours begin any day in Tel Aviv and are priced from \$3,495 per person double.

Travelers on a budget will enjoy the 8-day Israel Highlights motor coach tour. Conducted as a general interest tour, yet it visits many sites significant to both Christians and Jews. Priced from \$1,095 per person double, this tour begins every Sunday in Tel Aviv with two nights each in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and at a kibbutz hotel in the Galilee.

Call 800-644-1595; www.yallatours.com

\$240 **ZAMBIA**

New at **The Bushcamp Company** is the **Bush Spa at Mfuwe Lodge**, which embraces ancient therapeutic heritage of Africa through its products that contain blends of indigenous plants.

Rates for the Bushcamp Company properties range from \$240 to \$560 per person double per night. Some of camps are opened seasonally: **Mfuwe Lodge** is open all year, **Kapamba** and **Bilimungwe** opened on April 20 and closes Jan. 2 while **Chindeni**, **Chamilandu**, **Bilimungwe**, and **Kuyenda** are open from June through October.

Call 011-260-6-246041; info@bushcampcompany.com; www.bushcampcompany.com



KENYA NTO

\$1720 **KENYA**

SITA World Tours' Classic Kenya 11-day program, one of the tour operator's most popular tours allows guests to travel by road between camps, to take in every experience that Kenya has to offer.

Another popular Kenya program is SITA's Masai Footsteps which is a seven-day program includes Nairobi, Masai Mara, Lake Nakuru and Amboseli National Park. **Laudie Hanou, SITA's Vice President** adds "This safari takes in three of the most picturesque regions of Kenya and is truly one of the most exciting destinations in the world to experience". Masai Footsteps starts at \$1,720 per person double for land arrangements departures daily except Tues. and Fri.

SITA World Tours, headquartered in Los Angeles, California with offices throughout the nation, including New York, Houston, Dallas, Chicago, Vancouver and Toronto continues offers a myriad of African safaris in destinations such as Kenya, Tanzania, Botswana, Uganda and South Africa.

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Cyprus from Wine to Water

Story and photos by Denise Mattia

For centuries, the island of Cyprus has had a turbulent history that shaped its character. Its location on the sea route to the Aegean made it vital to traders as widespread as Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and Byzantium. There's hardly a stone that can't be traced to an elegantly styled edifice, artifact or statue of historical significance.

JAXFAX toured the island, stopping at the old harbor in the city of Lemesos (Limassol), to visit the Cyprus Medieval Museum, a 16th century fort, which was constructed on the site of a Byzantine castle. While walking past the ground's shaded gardens to adjacent streets lined with restored buildings, it was apparent that the lifestyle and culture of this thriving city is linked inexorably with its past. The renovated municipal market has become a popular venue for concert, dance, art and theatrical events, including a wine festival in September, a ten-night, consume-as-much-as-you-want wine-tasting affair.

Educating Palates

To educate visitors and locals about one of the oldest alcoholic beverages in history, the **Cyprus Wine Museum** in neighboring Erimi conducts lectured tours about Cypriot winemaking. Exhibited are centuries-old jars and vessels on loan from the Cyprus and Pierides Museums, in addition to early documents, which illustrate how grapes were cultivated, and the wine produced, stored and enjoyed. www.cypruswine-museum@cytanet.com.cy.

The wine producers at **Antoniades**

Winery (www.antoniadeswinery.com) in Lemesos (Limassol) have been given documentation, which proves that Cypriot wine dates to 3500 B.C.E., and, at the charming hillside village of Omodhos, JAXFAX was shown a 50-foot long ancient wine press. In June 2006, the **Cyprus Tourism Organization** developed and announced The Wine Routes of Cyprus, a project to attract special interest tourism. Scheduled to begin later this year, the excursions will be offered to wine devotees in America and abroad.

Thirteen tours will cover the five vine producing areas of Laona, Vouni Panagia-



Icon in Agios Neophytos Monastery in Pafos

Ampelitis, Commandaria, Pitsilia and Lemesos (Limassol). Two special routes will be devoted to Commandaria, the sweet, dessert wine, created – so the story goes – by the Crusaders under Richard the Lionheart, and said to have been made at the Cyprus Medieval Castle. Participants will be able to visit museums and archaeological sites and attend cultural events as well. For more information, a special website, DVD, maps and tour guides for the routes are available from the CTO.



The intercontinental Hotel – Aphrodite Hills

Mainliners Berthing

Today, Limassol (Lemesos) is the island's main gateway for cruises destined for ports in the east and west. In addition to weekly ferries to Greece (summer only), there are several cruise ships that sail to Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Greece and the Greek islands. These affordable, family-friendly cruises range from three to 11 days and are aboard modern ships with comfortable staterooms, restaurants, casinos and spacious lounge and entertainment areas. Among the cruise lines are **Louis Cruises**, www.louis-cruises.com; **Salamis Tours Ltd**, www.salamis-tours.com and **Paradise Cruises**, www.paradise.com.cy.

Cruise passengers can also choose from major U.S. cruise lines, which offer stopovers to this popular destination in conjunction with their Mediterranean and European itineraries. Among the big-name cruise liners are: **Holland America**, www.HollandAmerica.VacationsToGo.com; **Celebrity Cruises**, www.CelebrityCruises.com; **Oceania**, www.oceania-cruises.com; and **Silversea**, www.Silversea-Cruise-Line.com

Continued on page 37

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Zaragoza's Moment in the Sun



The Baroque-style Basilica del Pilar built in the 18th century.

By Denise Dube

Zaragoza, the capital of Spain's Aragonian region, is equidistant from Barcelona, Madrid, Bilbao and Valencia—all well-known and well-traveled sites. Little known and visited even less is Zaragoza, also known as Saragossa. It runs along the Ebro River and is the Cinderella of Spain. This princess has been modestly hiding behind too much humility and hasn't made anyone's "must see" list—not yet, anyway. But it is going to, in a huge way, when the International Water and Sustainable Development Exposition opens here this month.

The Expo Zaragoza runs from June 14 to September 14, 2008, and has been a few years in the making. Award-winning architects have transformed about 145 hectares of Zaragoza into a water park, open green space, playgrounds,

bars, restaurants, thermal spas, a police station and the headquarters for officials of the International Water Decade, designated from 2005-2015. About 80 countries and countless businesses are part of this event, one that will draw almost six million visitors and create jobs for about 10,000 people. Innovative buildings—including a high-rise gray facility shaped like a water drop—unusual and environmentally correct bridges, towers and parks will dot the property. The world will watch during those three months as visiting dignitaries focus on water-related issues while in Zaragoza. But those six million will see so much more than the expo. Once they have visited—not just the expo—they will have no choice but to tell others, who will also want to visit. Ready or not, Zaragoza will become one of those "must see" spots.

And, it's about time. The world seemed to lose touch with this gem steeped in ancient history, keeping it quaint,

"Thirst" display at Expotur Zaragoza



untouched and, unfortunately, unknown. But, this international expo will finally open the world's eyes to a city that was and is a major part of Spain's history, one that included Iberian, Muslim, Roman, Jewish and Christian religious influences. It will introduce curious travelers to thousands of years of culture that influenced Spain and the city that gave birth to various cathedrals, basilicas and museums.

Most people aren't aware that ancient Roman ruins are scattered throughout the city and that even more are being found at every construction site. Since the Romans arrived in Zaragoza about 14 BC it's no surprise. There is so much of the past underground the government now oversees any pending development.

A limestone Roman theater was unearthed decades ago. Now called the Caesaraugusta Theater Museum it is open to the public and protects the ruins and the artifacts found there. (The city's first name was Caesaraugusta, its moniker given by the Romans.)

The Aljaferia Palace, originally Islamic, was declared a National Monument of Historical and Artistic interest in 1931 and is also a UNESCO site. This 9th century turreted and fortified palace, complete with a moat, ancient arches and ornate carving, was transformed by different religious as each century and each religion passed through Zaragoza.

The Cathedral of San Salvador, better known as La Seo, is another treasure. Located in Plaza Pilar, the 12th century building combines various architectural styles that range from Romanesque to neoclassical. A panoramic 360-degree city view is all yours by taking the great dome elevator to the tower. The basilica's dome was painted by Goya.

Do not miss the Museo de Zaragoza, which houses a good amount of Goya's work. His frescoes are all over the walls. The 18th century artist was considered a founder of modern

2008 Expotur in Zaragoza



art. His family came from Zaragoza and the city claims him as its

own. (The Goya family lived in Zaragoza, but his father took a temporary job in Fuendetodos where Goya was born there. Yes, they moved back.)

The Basilica of Our Lady of the Pilar, a pilgrimage site for Catholics, houses the pink marble pillar. Legend says that Mary brought the pillar to Zaragoza 30 years after her son died. A church was built there a year after her visit and many more were built over it. Over the centuries some tried to take pieces of the marble, so it was covered and protected. One small oval opening allows visitors to touch the stone. Centuries of rubbing have created a concave dip in the rose-scented marble icon.

The oldest stone bridge, or the Puente de Piedra, still spans the Ebro River and is used today. This gothic bridge was garnished in recent years with four bronze lions, done by the sculptor, Francisco Rallo.

There are far too many sites, spots and historic monuments to list. But, once there, people will find it all. And then others will come and find that and more. Zaragoza officials know this and they are getting the city ready. Buildings are being transformed into hotels. New railways and bus lines will make it easy to get to Zaragoza and, once there, to see its spectacular sites. Zaragoza is as vital as Barcelona, Madrid, Bilbao or Valencia. The expo won't just deal with issues of water—it will reintroduce the world to an international treasure. Yes, it's about time.

For information, contact the Tourist Office of Spain: New York (212-265-8822); Miami (305-358-1992); Chicago (312-642-1992) or Los Angeles (323-658-7188); www.spain.info

For consolidator fares and tour packages to Spain see page 77-78 of the Listings Section

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Wisdom of Rail Travel

Dubbed the “Great Unifier of Europe” after World War II, Europe’s rail network might once again be at the top of agents’ lists of products they proffer this year. Well-traveled clients can easily manage rail rides over astronomical fuel prices this summer; and for newbies, rail tickets offer a far less stressful option compared to taking to the open road.

The **Eurail Group**, owner of the popular Eurail Pass for European announced a 5% increase in passenger numbers for 2007. Passenger numbers exceeded 468,000 for the year, setting a new record since sales began nearly 50 years ago.

Changing travel behavior has impacted Eurail’s sales. Overseas visitors are becoming more sophisticated, and their desire to visit as much of Europe as possible has been replaced by a wish to explore just one or two selected destinations. Eurail reports booming sales of one- and two-country passes. With the addition of the very popular Eurail Italy Pass in 2007, sales of single country passes have sky-rocketed by nearly 500% and now account for 16% of all Eurail’s sales (compared to a mere 3% in 2006). But so have regional passes such as the ScanRail Pass. And as high as the euro may go, the Swiss Travel Pass may very well be one of this year’s top bargains.

Product lines, much like the rail network themselves, are crisscrossing corporate lines this summer more than ever. Agents can choose from purchasing tickets and passes from the **ACP Rail** and **Britrail** (which sells a wide variety of passes throughout the U.K. and beyond) the **Eurail Group**, which sells passes within 20 countries.

Rail Europe, which also sells rail products to 31 countries, is the top seller for the Eurostar, the high-speed passenger train operator between Britain and mainland Europe, which reported a 21.3% rise in traveler numbers to 2.17 million between January and March 2008, compared to the same period last year. Ticket revenues increased by 25.2% during the first full three-months of carbon neutral journeys on High Speed 1, the new 186 mph line between St Pancras International and the Channel Tunnel.

ACP Rail and **Britrail** are offering travelers aged 16 to 25 who purchase any Eurail Pass a 50% discount on the regular adult price of a standard-class BritRail Consecutive Pass, BritRail Flexi-Pass, BritRail England Consecutive Pass or BritRail England Flexi-Pass. The discount offer is valid throughout 2008. With the discount, the all-access, standard-class, four-day BritRail Consecutive Pass costs \$130; the FlexiPass, \$165. The discounted cost for a four-day BritRail England Consecutive Pass is \$105; the FlexiPass, \$133. Visit www.britrail.com

Additionally, ACP is selling the Eurail Scandinavia Pass for rail travel in all four Scandinavian countries for as few as four days or as many as 10 days within two months. Adult second class prices start at a \$344. New Eurail Regional dual-country passes allow clients to pair Sweden with Denmark (from \$307), Finland (starting at \$308), or Norway (from \$326) for four days of adult second class travel within a two-month period.

Eurail Passes are available from the direct sales website, www.Eurail.com, and all sales agents worldwide; **ACP Rail International** (www.eurail-acprail.com); Flight Centre



RAIL EUROPE

(www.flightcentre.com); www.OctopusTravel.com; **Rail Europe** (www.raileurope.com) and **STA Travel** (www.statravel.com).

Earlier this year the **Eurail Group** unveiled its new branding with a new logo and tagline. The pass range was updated with new participating countries, such as the Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. The Eurail Group manages the famous Eurail Passes that allow unlimited train travel in Europe for non-European visitors worldwide. Additionally, this year Eurail Group took over management of the InterRail product range aimed at the European domestic market, a move that prompted the new, more inclusive branding.

Now passengers can travel throughout the region’s excellent rail systems using just a single pass – the Eurail Scandinavia Pass, which replaces the former ScanRail Pass.

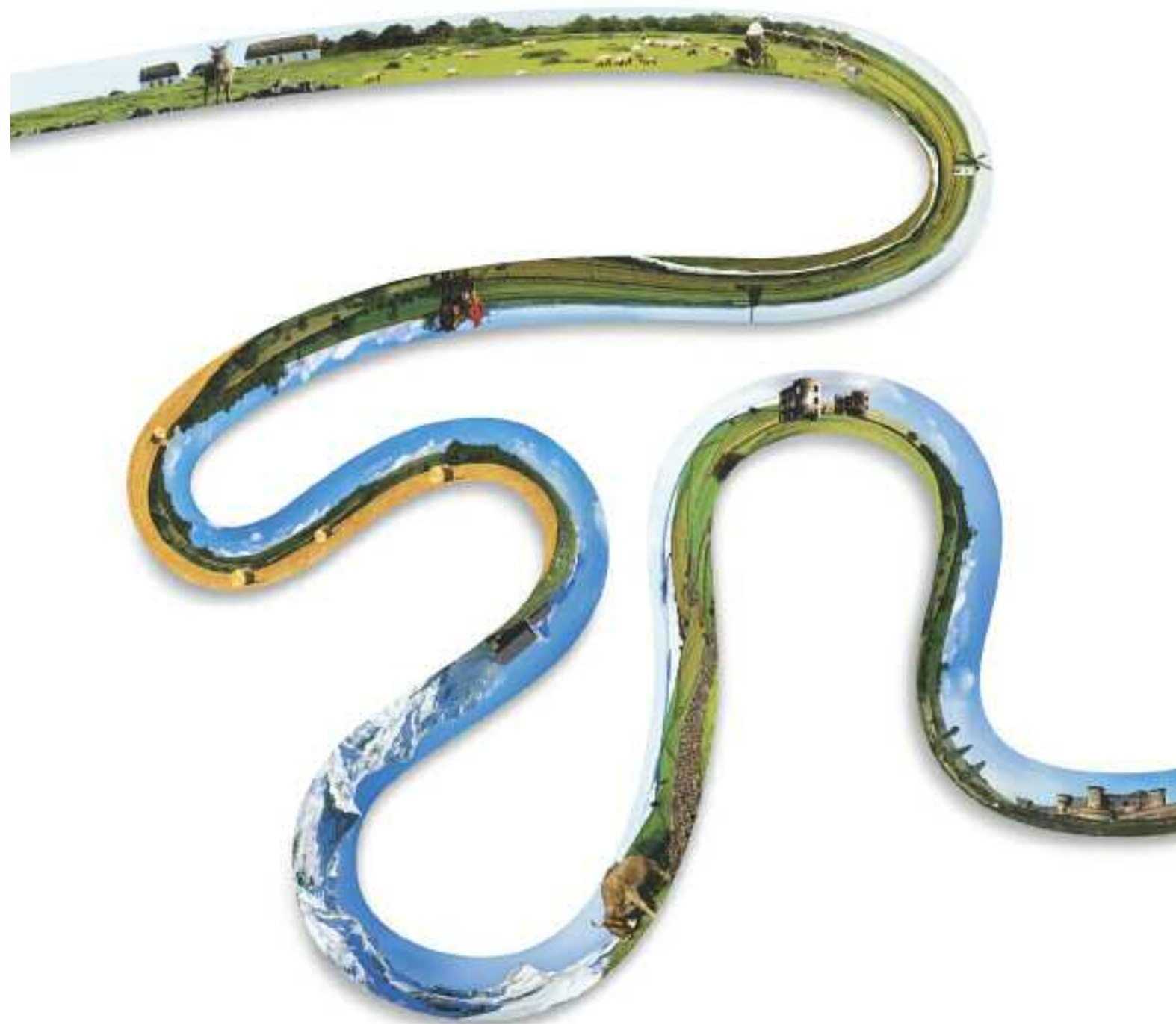
The new pass enables unlimited 2nd class rail travel in all four participating countries and is available throughout a range of validity periods. Discounts are offered to groups of two or more and to young people under the age of 26. Prices start from just 50 euros or \$76 a day for a four-day Saver Pass making cross border connections easy and efficient. Traveling from Oslo to Stockholm takes just over six hours, while Stockholm to Copenhagen is a five-hour ride. Connections between Helsinki and Stockholm are by ships operated by **Tallink Silja Oy**, which gives Eurail Pass holders a 50% reduction on the full fare of the crossing.

The Eurail Group offers a wide range of passes from single country options to the classic Eurail Global Pass, valid in 20 countries. Visit www.EurailGroup.com

Unlike other travel products purchased in Europe that have become more expensive as the dollar falls against European currencies, the dollar prices of all Swiss Travel System products sold in North America by **Rail Europe** are fixed for the entire year. Because the dollar has fallen 15% against the Swiss franc recently, a traveler buying here in North America saves considerably over purchasing the pass in francs in Switzerland.

The **Swiss Pass** in 2008 starts at \$174 (2nd class) or \$261 (1st class) per adult for 4 consecutive days of travel on Swiss trains, postal buses, city transit systems and lake steamers, and the price is guaranteed for the whole year. Swiss Passes are also available for non-consecutive days within a longer time frame (Flexipass). Among the bonuses of a Swiss Pass: free admission to more than 400 museums throughout Switzerland, 50% discount on most mountaintop excursions by special trains or cable cars, as well as discounts on high-speed and overnight trains to France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Austria. Children under 16 travel free when accompanied by a parent with a paid Swiss Pass. Agent commission on Swiss Passes starts at 5% for electronic bookings.

To book individual or group travel on Swiss trains, and trains throughout Europe, log on to Rail Europe’s agent site, call 888-382-7245; <http://agent.raileurope.com>



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EUROPE

Italy under \$500 a day

As a non-card carrying member of the baby boomer generation, I shudder to write that headline, but as I quake in my pockets, I know it is only too realistic. Backpacking may not be a thing of the past for all of us [it more or less is for me], but the backpack mentality baby boomers carry with them gives them an edge on knowing how to travel on the cheap or on the affordable in a Euro dominant summer. Below are a few of the efforts suppliers have made to keep things "reasonable" this summer.

A name not normally associated with Western Europe, **QueensLander Tours'** Great Cities of Italy tour boasts free air from several east coast gateways and discounted fares from other U.S. gateways.

The 10-day, 'true small-group tour' experience takes travelers through Venice, Florence, San Gimignano and Cortona in Tuscany, Rome, and the Amalfi Coast lodging in Sorrento all in the same tour with a pace that can only be described as leisurely. The Free Air promotion is available on summer and fall departures of the Italy's Great Cities Tour. Robust commissions as well as centrally located hotels round out the package. Priced at \$3,849 with QueensLander's. A no Tipping Policy makes this Great Cities tour even more agent friendly.

Call 877-865-6711; www.QLTours.com

Following a family tradition, Steve Perillo is also offering



Padua, St Antonio

free air to Italy this summer (remember how Mario used to offer cheap if not free seats on PanAm?). The limited time offer can save couples up to \$2,560 on the air component when they depart from New York's JFK Airport to Rome, Bologna and Palermo aboard **Eurofly** on selected Perillo tours. This promotion only applies for new bookings on the following tours and 2008 departure dates, based on availability. Among the tours the offer applies to are the Vesuvius Tour - July 27 departure dates only; 10 days to Rome, Florence and Naples; the South & Sicily Tour - July 30 departure date only; 14 Days to Palermo, Taormina, Naples and Rome; and the Aristocrat Tour - August 19 departure date

only 11 days to Venice, Florence and Rome. Due to the unprecedented nature of this offer, space is filling fast.

Call 800- 431-1515; www.perillo.com

Visit Italy Tours' executives are convinced the lure of Rome is strong and exhilarating to both the first-time visitors and the seasoned travelers.

The company has introduced a special \$1,249 per person double, for a six-day/four-night Rome package valid through June 30, 2008. Departures are from Boston, Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles. This package features four nights' accommodation in a centrally located three-star hotel, daily breakfast, roundtrip economy air on **Alitalia** from the selected cities. Hotel service charges and VAT taxes are included in the price; airport taxes and fuel surcharges are additional.

Call 800-255-3537; fax 310-649-6880; E-mail info@VisitItalyTours.com; www.VisitItalyTours.com

Location, location, location, a quote attributed often to Conrad Hilton, could not be more truly applied than it is to the **Bettoja Hotels** in Rome and Florence. Apart from location, the Bettoja family has been serving U.S. travelers for generations, long enough to know that this clientele needs an ample buffet breakfast, service and taxes all rolled into one easy price: in this case, rooms start at 150 euros or \$230 per night for two sharing a room.

In Rome, the four properties and the museums Scuderie del Quirinale and Palazzo Esposizioni have teamed up to promote the arts by releasing an informative brochure that lists all the upcoming exhibits through 2009 in both Rome venues. This will give travelers an opportunity to plan their visits well in advance around once-in-a-lifetime shows such as a collection of Giovanni Bellini or an exhibition of the Etruscan civilization.

Besides being for the arts, the Bettoja Hotels are near the arts. **Mediterraneo**, **Massimo D'Azeglio**, **Atlantico**, and **Nord** are one block from the new Roman Archeological Museum, within walking distance of Scuderie del Quirinale, Palazzo Esposizioni, the Colosseum, and St. Mary Major. As a matter of fact, this arts brochure includes a map of a walking tour to all nearby museums.

In Florence, Bettoja's 69-room **Relais Certosa**, completed a recent renovation of many of the guestrooms. Bordering a Medieval Monastery, the Certosa of Galluzzo, this 14th century edifice crowns the hill near the hotel, as beautiful a backdrop as can be found in Tuscany. Yet the property is only 15 minutes by hotel van to the center of Florence itself.

The **Relais Certosa** is located close to the Rome Milan superhighway making it the perfect base for exploring the Tuscan and the Siennese countryside.

Call 800-783-6904; www.bettojahotels.it

Indeed, with the dollar sinking and euro rising, hotels in Rome and Venice seem outrageously expensive. The solution is www.rentalo.com, an online directory of apartments and villas that makes it possible for couples, groups of friends and even large families to afford a trip to Italy. Offers range from a two-bedroom Rome rental, 330 yards from the Colosseum and Roman Forum for \$133 a night to \$435 a night for a two-bedroom, two-bath Venetian villa with a private garden and canal view and tennis court.

Women are invited to enjoy the camaraderie of a fitness-oriented and pampering vacation with the **Wayfarers'** new "girlfriends getaway" Cinque Terre itinerary. An energetic walk that covers mule tracks by road, and hills via stone steps, Cinque Terre offers an immersion into the area called

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Meridiana All flights are operated in code-share with Meridiana Airlines. Eurowfly is part of the Meridiana Group.

by many the most beautiful part of Italy and one that is best visited by foot. Accommodations are in a former 16th-century Franciscan monastery with a state-of-the-art Wellness Spa and in a hotel with its own sandy beach. Priced at \$3,795 per person double, the seven-day/six-night walk takes place on September 21-27 (women only) and October 5-11 and includes 6-8 miles of walking per day.

Call 800-249-4620; www.thewayfarers.com

For the fifth straight year Italy placed first as the hottest destination for Americans taking packaged vacations (tours and vacation packages), according to a recent poll of U.S. Tour Operators Association members. And for many Americans Sicily holds a special appeal. Senior Savings: **General Tours World Traveler** works closely with AARP members to offer a \$115 per person savings on a \$2,899 per person for an eight-day journey across Sicily. Exploring archaeological sites and Sicily's culture, traditions, cuisine and art, the land only package includes 14 meals, sightseeing, and all on-tour transportation. Departures are in September, and October 2008 and April 2009.

Call 800-221-2216; www.generaltours.com

The North and South of \$500+ a Day

Shop, Wine and Dine

Headed by Annamaria Sorrentino, a veteran professional who worked at VARIG, **Shop, Wine and Dine** specializes in preparing innovative travel experiences focusing on Italy's food and wine. Its programs typically incorporate local cultural events that uphold centuries' old traditions hoping to provide opportunities to experience life as it's lived and savored by the Italians and showcase Italy's unmistakable, impeccable style and flair. Shop Wine and Dine's programs are especially appropriate as innovative options for meetings, retreats and women's travel.

Torino and the Alba National Truffle Fair-The Ultimate Oenogastronomic Experience: Any serious wine and food lover will appreciate the succulent details of this Piemonte tour.

Museums, the spectacular-newly re-opened Venaria Palace, Porta Palazzo the largest open air market in Europe, the Eataly food complex-soon to be opened in New York, shopping, a three day Chocolate pass and exquisite meals at some of the best

restaurants in the city are the main ingredients in Torino, Piemonte's elegant capital city. The balance of the stay will be in Piemonte's wine region with the focus on the world famous Barolo, Barbaresco wines and the National Truffle Fair in Alba. The all-inclusive land package features a truffle hunt with dogs, a cooking class, all the meals including wines at the best restaurants in the area-at least two Michelin starred, wine tastings with top producers, guided tours of the main cultural attractions and of course the white truffle.

Departure is set for October 15-22, 2008; priced at \$5,010 per person double. Travel agent's commission is 5% based on a minimum booking of six passengers.

Optional extensions to Piemonte's Lake region of Lago d'Orta and Lago Maggiore and/or to the thermal spa area of Acqui Terme and outlet shopping or any other destination in Italy. Similar, fall Piemonte tours featuring other local festivals are offered.

Call 973-467-4418; E-mail info@shopwineanddine.com

The Quiet Landlocked Region of Basilicata

Set within the heart of the medieval town of Maratea, the newly renovated luxury hotel, the 27-room **La Locanda Delle Donne Monache**, sister hotel to **Casa Angelina** in Amalfi, was originally built as a convent in 1735.

Sure to be the next destination for global trendspotters, Maratea's naturally protected port boasts some of the most beautiful 'robin egg blue' waters along this stretch of coastline. Small fishing boats bob in the water next to luxury yachts, yet the town remains untouched by commercial tourism. Easy to explore by foot, Maratea's quaint and beautiful town is set within narrow winding streets and picturesque little squares where small shops sell local food specialties, lace and colorful ceramics. The region of Basilicata is nestled between Calabria and Puglia yet, is just a two-hour drive from Amalfi.

Four nights' accommodation, including two dinners, massages, champagne and more, begin at \$2,760.

E-mail reservations@locandamonache.com

For consolidator airfares and tour packages to Italy see page 73-75 of the Listings Section



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Includes roundtrip airfare from BOS/JFK/EWR to Malta via British Airways/Virgin Air, 5 nights in Classic sea-view rooms, either at the First Class Hotel Victoria in Sliema or the Deluxe Westin Dragonara in St. Julians (from \$2199 Air/Land), Buffet Breakfast and Dinner daily, private car transfers, arrival and departure transfers and choice of one full-day sightseeing excursion with lunch

For reservations or more information please call toll-free 800-225-6290 (617-375-9400 for local calls).

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IN THE NEWS

EF-USA Launches Direct Flights to Puglia

Eurofly, now known as **EF-USA**, introduced its new direct flight from New York's JFK International Airport to the southern regional capital of Bari in Puglia, which lies along the Adriatic Sea in Italy. Scheduled flights depart from New York every Thursday through Sept. 25, 2008, which gives clients an opportunity to participate in the annual Festa della Madonna in Bari held on Sept. 14. Fares start at \$799 plus a \$230 fuel surcharge and \$86 government taxes for June.

Bari joins the growing list of direct and non-stop flights offered this year along with Lamezia, Calabria; Pescara, Abruzzo; Palermo, Sicily; Naples, Campania; Bologna, Emilia Romagna; and Rome in Lazio making Eurofly the airline with direct flights from JFK to the most cities within Italy.

Agents must register to qualify for a 5% commission on all reservations to any of Eurofly's destinations.

Call 800-459-4980; fax 212-609-7077; Email: info@euroflyvacations.com; www.eurofly.com

AF Launches New Evening Flights

Air France will add late evening daily nonstop flights between New York-JFK and Paris-Charles de Gaulle Airport on June 23, 2008 through Sept. 28, 2008, and benefit travelers looking for the ease and convenience associated with later evening travel. These flights, operated by the Airbus 300-200 series, are some of the last available departing from the U.S. to Europe and vice versa.

The eastbound flight, AF005, departs JFK at 1:00 a.m. and arrives in Paris at 2:10 p.m. the next day, leaving ample time for passengers to connect to from points in the U.S. to New York and then connect beyond Paris. The new late night westbound flight, AF004, leaves Paris at 8:45 p.m. and arrives at JFK at 10:50 p.m. allowing for a full day of work or vacation in Paris. Call 800-237-2747; www.airfrance/us

Cyprus with Homeric Tours under \$2,000

The popular Irresistable Cyprus package includes three nights in Pafos for a full-day tour of the nearby mountain villages and take a donkey ride, and three nights in the sea-side town of Lemesos. Here travelers can enjoy the miles of beautiful beaches, visit the many cultural treasures and enjoy a full-day tour of the Troodos Mountains, Lefkara and Kykkos. Air-inclusive prices begin at \$1,969 per person double out of New York, plus fuel surcharges, buffet breakfast, and all transfers.

The natural combination of Cyprus and Greece makes a culturally exciting vacation so Homeric is selling four nights at a beachfront hotel in Lemesos, two nights in Athens and a three-night cruise of the Greek Islands - including visits to Mykonos, Rhodes, Patmos and more - are included - at the starting price of \$2,389 per person double.

Call 800-223-5570; email: info@homerictours.com; www.homerictours.com

Spa Trekking in Greece and Crete

Known for its Greek Island Hopping packages to Greece, **Cloud Tours** can also help agents plan the perfect Greek SPA getaway for your client.

In Crete, the magnificent Six Senses Spas situated within Porto Elounda deluxe resort is the most breathtaking spa in the whole of Greece and was recently awarded "Best Spa of the World" by Sunday Times' Travel Magazine.

Its range of renowned therapies and signature treatments focuses on health, beauty, stress reduction and wellness, using pure, natural and environmentally friendly products. Earthly colors and materials blend with heavenly works of contemporary art. A magical environment and an unforgettable experience is what the Six Senses Spa™ is all about.

In addition, jetset Mykonos offers the Thalassotherapy Spas of the Myconian Collection. Three sister hotels make up the Myconian Collection: the Royal Myconian and Imperial, Leading Hotels of the World and the Myconian Ambassador, a Relais Chateaux hotel.

All three hotels offer an unforgettable Thalassotherapy (Sea in Greek) Spa experience.

Call 800-223-7880; 718-721-3808; or E-mail info@cloudtours.com; www.cloudtours.com



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IN THE NEWS

Incentives for Planning Ahead

With the 2008 season nearly sold out, **Scenic Tours'** European River Cruising is encouraging agents to persuade clients to book ahead. As an incentive for booking a 2009 departure before September 30, 2008, voyagers traveling on the Rhine and Danube "15 Day Jewels of Europe Luxury River Cruise" can choose from three exclusive deals, while those traveling on other itineraries will be given a discount for reserving early.

Two separate offers allow couples or companions complimentary air to Europe for the 15-day cruise, with distinctive Fly Free savings of up to \$1,600. Early birds can receive up to \$750 in savings for luxury rooms aboard Scenic vessels for all dates on all 2009 itineraries.

Scenic Tours is now offering 11, 12, 15, 18 and 24 day itineraries for 2009, allowing travelers to choose from various combinations of land tours and cruises. The 11-day itineraries, "Gems of the Danube" or "Moselle & Rhine Escapade," combine three nights in either Paris or Prague with a seven-night cruise. While the 12-day "Black Sea Explorer" provides two nights in Budapest and two nights in Bucharest along with a seven-night cruise.

Visit www.scenictours.com

Swiss-Philly Links

SWISS and **USAirways'** codeshare agreement offers SWISS passengers the opportunity to fly from Philadelphia to Zurich on USAirways-operated flights so US Airways passengers have onward connections from Zurich operated by SWISS to 10 European destinations. USAirways also becomes SWISS' codeshare partner on services to 10 destinations in Europe so passengers can opt for SWISS-operated onward connections from Zurich to Athens, Bucharest, Düsseldorf, Geneva, Hanover, Luxembourg, Nice, Nuremberg, Stuttgart and Vienna. Call 877-FLY SWISS; www.swiss.com

Dollar Stretchers in Finland

With the Euro up and the Dollar down travelers of all styles will find a bounty of free and inexpensive things to see and do in Finland's exciting capital this summer. Summer fun includes free concerts, city cards good for discounts and free rides on trams and trolleys, roving tourist helpers and free bike rentals. Helsinki awaits the five million tourists expected to visit between May and Sept. when the average midday temperature is 72 degrees, the city's parks are lush green and the midsummer sun just about doubles vacation time with almost 24 hours of daylight.

The "3T" Tour: Do your clients prefer sightseeing on their own? For about 2 Euros or \$3 they can hop Tram No. 3 (in either direction T or B) and do a figure 8 through Helsinki. www.hel.fi/wps/wcm/resources/file/eb950102caf5a17/3T_english_2007_net.pdf

Helsinki Helpers: A Helsinki Helper is a valuable, and free, bonus to summer travels in Helsinki. The 20+ specially schooled, mostly tow-headed Helsinki Helpers are ready to assist in up to 20 languages, including English, Japanese and Croatian. They are found daily in key tourist areas of city center such as the Esplanade and have been known to go to extremes to help visitors.

Visit www.hel.fi/filharmonia.

Call 877-463-4652; www.visitfinland.com

LHW Holds Line on Luxe Hotel Rates

The Leading Hotels of the World, Ltd. has announced a Guaranteed US Dollar Rate program, enabling guests to know, in advance, the cost of their accommodations abroad. Rates at nearly 60 participating hotels are set in U.S. dollars, and paid in advance at the time of booking, thus letting guests "know before they go" what the precise amount of their hotel expenditures will be. Among the hotels participating in the program are The Milestone Hotel and The Ritz in London, Hotel Le Bristol and Hotel Raphael in Paris, Hotel Majestic in Rome, Hotel Le Palais in Prague, Hotel Metropole in Monte Carlo, The Scotsman in Edinburgh, and The Hotel Baltschug Kempinski in Moscow.

Refer to booking code L09. Call 800-223-6800; www.lhw.com and www.lhwspas.com

High-Tech Global Rail Booking

Wandrian, Inc. announced a new global rail booking technology dedicated to official North American tour operators, tour.railagent.com (not to be confused with RailAgent.com, the company's web site dedicated to travel agents). The site offers Net rates for Italian train tickets, and also offers pricing for other Global train products. Operators can register on tour.railagent.com. Once approved, they will be able to book tickets, and then print them in-house or have them shipped to their offices.

Operators who include rail as part of a package will now have access to Net Fares on Italian domestic trains, and cross-border trains, such as the Artesia (Italy-France) and Cisalpino (Italy – Switzerland). As preferred by Tour Operators, these low Net fares will not have the price printed on the tickets.

Said Charles de Gaspé Beaubien, Senior Vice President of Business Development, "This new state of the art booking system makes it easier than ever for tour operators to offer more rail inclusive packages to Italy and the rest of Europe. Tour.RailAgent.com will alleviate some of the frustrations tour operators might have experienced in the past booking rail, thanks to our direct access to the Italian inventory and the ability to book groups online in an automated fashion."

Call Chris Canavan, Director of Industry Development, at 617-630-0250, EXT 296; www.tour.railagent.com

Travel Bound Reduces Hotel Prices

Independent travel wholesale provider **Travel Bound** has reduced prices on all hotels and transfers in its top-selling destination, Italy booked by June 30.

Prices are cut 5% on all 1,664 hotels sold by Travel Bound in Italy, including such prestigious properties as the Bauer in Venice, the Ambasciatori in Rome, and the Helvetia and Bristol in Florence. The price of private transfers in 53 Italian towns and cities is reduced by up to 10%.

Travel Bound also offers "stay for/pay for" deals at 50 properties in 29 Italian towns/cities, so that clients receive either one free night or a significant discount – in some cases 50% - on additional nights above a certain number. Among the hotels offering a stay for/pay for promotion with Travel Bound is the four-star **Lorenzo Il Magnifico** in Florence, where a fourth night is free when three nights are booked at a rate of \$159.50 per night for a twin room in August.

Call -800-808-9541; www.booktravelbound.com



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Top Hotels Make Britain, A "Brit" Easier to Sell

Travel agents can assure UK-bound clients that Britain isn't as expensive as they might think. Some of London's top luxury hotels are offering commissionable dollar prices to US travel agents, and 2008 is the perfect time to head to London and Britain. Agents might call **800-462-2748**, or download from www.visitbritain.com/trade

The five-star **Athenaeum Hotel and Apartments** (www.athenaeumhotel.com) in London is offering dollar rates for American travelers in 2008, beginning at \$350 for an executive guestroom with a four-night stay. The current pound sterling rate for that room category is £350, so the saving represents a pound for dollar rate.

Call 800-335-3300 or use GDS code YX.

Red Carnation Hotels (www.redcarnationhotels.com), a group of six luxury boutique hotels in London, is offering guaranteed dollar rates for your clients through January 31, 2009. The dollar rate is set at \$1.80 to one British Pound, and includes complimentary continental breakfast and tax (VAT at 17.5%). Agents can book through their GDS or through each hotel, requesting the guaranteed rates. For example, during low season (July 28 through September 4, 2008; and December 15, 2008 through January 31, 2009), the dollar rate is \$296 a night at the group's four-star The Rubens hotel which overlooks Buckingham Palace's Royal Mews; while the rate at the five-star The Milestone hotel opposite Kensington Palace is \$497.

The **Royal Garden Hotel** (www.royalgardenhotel.co.uk), a five-star property in London's Kensington neighborhood, is offering a 'Guaranteed Dollar Rate' with a Superior Room costing \$450 including taxes and continental breakfast. Family rooms, which comfortably sleep two adults and two children, are \$700. Valid through the end of 2008 and is commissionable at 10% by contacting hotel reservations.

The **Cadogan** (www.cadogan.com), a luxury hotel in London's Knightsbridge neighborhood, is offering dollar rates starting at \$399 per night for a double room inclusive of tax and continental breakfast for two, through 2008. That rate is a \$294.25 saving on the rack rate, and is commissionable at 10% for travel agents; when they contact the hotel directly.

Chewton Glen country house hotel in England and **The Stafford** in London are offering a "Bright Lights and Country Sights" package from \$2,043 per person double through 2008. The package includes two nights each in a Bronze Room at Chewton Glen midweek and at The Stafford in a King Room over a weekend, and a one-way chauffer transfer between the two properties, continental breakfast daily, three-course dinner one evening at The Stafford with a half bottle of wine per person, three course dinner both evenings at Chewton Glen, and one afternoon tea per person per stay at Chewton Glen. Tax (VAT at 17.5%) and service charge included. Visit www.chewtonglen.com; www.thestaffordhotel.co.uk.

Fosse Manor Hotel, located in England's Cotswolds region, is offering a "Mid-week garden lover's break" from



Cornwall.

BRITAIN INFO

£124 per room per night for bookings of two or three nights. The offer is available for bookings through September 30, 2008, and includes: accommodations with breakfast, entry tickets to two nearby gardens – Batsford Arboretum and Snowhill Manor, three-course dinner in the hotel restaurant on one night of the stay. Visit www.fossemanor.co.uk

The **Draycott Hotel**, a luxury townhouse in London, is offering guaranteed dollar rates through the end of 2008. A double room starts at \$421 per night including tax. The hotel offers guests complimentary tea with homemade cookies at 4pm each day, champagne at 6 pm, and hot chocolate at 10pm in the drawing room. Visit www.draycotthotel.com

The **Leonard Hotel & Apartments** – an independent Eighteenth Century townhouse hotel in London – is offering a three-night dollar rate package valid in August. A deluxe room costs \$1,469 for the package, which includes car transfers to and from London Heathrow Airport, continental breakfast or afternoon tea on the day of arrival, English breakfast daily, VAT (taxes); during high season the rate is \$1,574. Visit www.theleonard.com

Cotswold House located in the English Cotswolds, is offering a 20% fixed dollar rate saving on a two-night stay. The package starts at \$850 for a double room and includes two nights accommodation, full English breakfast and tax, valid for stays from Sunday – Thursday until Dec. 31, 2008. Visit www.cotswoldhouse.com

Eleven Cadogan Gardens – a luxury townhouse hotel in London – is offering a 20% fixed dollar rate saving on room rates. The package starts at \$405 a night and includes full English breakfast and tax, valid for stays from Friday – Sunday, subject to availability. www.number-eleven.co.uk

Premier Inn is one of Britain's leading budget hotel brands, with room prices starting from £48 a night. With 480 hotels across the country, Premier Travel Inn also has some of the best locations in London including London County Hall beside the River Thames with rooms from £99 a night. The brand offers a 'Good Night Guarantee' whereby they guarantee guests a clean, comfortable room and friendly and efficient service – if they don't live up to their promise, they will refund your money. www.premierinn.com

Client Essentials

VisitBritain offers "The Essential London Kit" at just \$119, which contains a three-day London Travel Card (Peak, Zones 1-2), one London Eye ticket, one Tower of London ticket and one Original London Sightseeing bus tour ticket, which also includes a Thames river cruise and two walking tours. "The Essential London Kit" can be purchased online.

VisitBritain offers the **Great British Heritage Pass** providing American visitors with unlimited entry to around 600 stately homes, castles and properties in England, Scotland and Wales. A four-day pass costs \$60; seven-day \$88; 15-day \$99; and 30-day \$117. (Can be purchased online.)

Visitor Oyster Cards are the new money-saving answer for travelers using London's buses and subway. The smart card guarantees that travelers will never pay more than the equivalent day TravelCard price. They can be purchased through VisitBritain.

VisitBritain has joined forces with **American Airlines** for a new promotion to help boost visits from the United States to London and the rest of Britain. Some 630,000 American Airlines and VisitBritain customers will be offered the chance to take advantage of a series of special offers on travel in and around London as well as attractions and train travel to other parts of Britain. Visit www.visitbritain.com

For consolidator airfares and tour packages to Britain see page 68 of the Listings Section

CYPRUS

Continued from page 24

Beause of the island's modern infrastructure, passengers disembarking at Lemesos (Limassol) can choose from a number of tours to major museums and sites, many of which are easily accessible. The island's capital, Lefkosia (Nicosia), is about 45 miles from Limassol. The priceless art and antiquities at the Cyprus Museum spans a period of 8,000 years and rivals works displayed at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. Although extensive, it's possible to view the collection and then enjoy a typical "meze" lunch at a taverna in Laiki Yeitonia, the restored pedestrian area in the old part of the city. Admirers of Byzantine art can view more than 200 icons, and numerous vessels, robes and books dating from the 9th to the 19th centuries at the Byzantine Museum and Art Galleries, and later watch demonstrations of traditional art and crafts made at the Cyprus Handicraft Center and gift shop, where pottery, wood-carvings, metalwork and tapestries, lace and embroidered items are available for purchase.

Another popular shore excursion, less than nine miles west of Lemesos (Limassol), includes a visit to the 15th century Kolossi Castle. Close by, the magnificent Kourion Greco-Roman Theater affords a spectacular view of the Mediterranean Sea, as does the Sanctuary of Apollo, farther west at Pafos, the birthplace of Aphrodite. The famous mosaics in the Houses of Dionysus, Orpheus, Aion and the Villa of Theseus are found at the Archaeological Park there. Backed by the rocky hillside, the beautiful sunbaked town that touches the sea has been designated a World Heritage site by Unesco. Cypriots know it as the town of Aphrodite.

For information, contact the Cyprus Tourist Organization: gocyprus@aol.com; www.visitcyprus.org.cy

IN THE NEWS

Athenaeum's Bulloch Passes Away

Sally Bulloch, executive manager at the **Athenaeum Hotel** until her retirement to South Africa in 2002, passed away on April 10 at age 59. "Sally was the face of the Athenaeum for more than 25 years," states Jonathan Critchard, general manager. "She was adored and respected by hotel staff as well as the countless number of guests for whom she took such special care and attention. Sally was such a major part of the Athenaeum's history... her passing will leave a void that will never be filled." Sally started at the Athenaeum in 1975 as a Sales Manager and was soon Public Relations Manager for the **Rank Hotels Group** (owners of the Athenaeum at the time). Sally took a sabbatical from the hotel in 1984 for eight years to host a popular radio show in Malta, set up her own London public relations agency and help launch the **Draycott** and the **Pelham Hotels**. She returned to the Athenaeum in 1992 as Executive Manager and remained on-staff until her retirement in 2002. Sally had a genius for making guests feel at home. Her natural charm and effervescent personality attracted everyone....Hollywood showbiz, London society and people of all nationalities, from all walks of life. Travel colleagues are invited to express their condolences of remembrances of Sally by E-mailing: marketing@athenaeumhotel.com

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It's got to be Austria!

Though small in size, Austria ranks number nine worldwide in international arrivals and can look back at a long history of hospitality. Austria is well known for high culture and stunning scenery, the country's contemporary appeal in architecture, art, design or wine travel is not as well known yet to Americans.

Austria's new promotions awaken a longing for a vacation in Austria. Advertising images and text combine to tell the shortest of stories, and in so doing create a bit of a surprise. In one of the country's new print ads, visitors to Vienna's Museumsquartier are shown relaxing in the midday sun on oversized beach-chairs. It is not the usual image of people looking at a work of art, instead a short story is told: a story about people who love art, not in an effort to acquire knowledge, but because art excites their emotions.

Decisive Moment

Petra Stolba, CEO of the **Austrian Tourist Office**, says of the ads, "with the new campaign we want to fashion a stage for all those things that make Austria special, that open unanticipated perspectives, as well as the familiar. We seduce with images that suggest continuity while injecting fresh impulses. What we want to do is spotlight reasons—be they festivals or museums—that could tip the scales in favor of a vacation in Austria. In short, our campaign targets the decisive moment'."

The branding presents a new, exciting, and still little-known Austria, such as "Austria's Winery Boom" a traveling exhibition that showcases Austria's wine producers while the "Contemporary Art, Architecture and Austrian Design" will be the focus this fall with online marketing, and collaborations with art and culture publications.

"We aim not only to provide travelers with new aspects of Austrian culture, but also introduce new regional destinations that thus far are known mostly to insiders and experts" says **Michael Gigl**, Director North America for the Austrian Tourist Office.

Visit www.austria-tourism.biz

BEST BUYS

\$2000 ITALY The heart and soul of Tuscany is found in its wine and olive oil. Set among 600 acres of flourishing vineyards and olive groves, the 26-room luxury hotel, **Villa Mangiacane** is the producer of three distinctive wines. Visitors dine on a four-course dinner on the first night, followed by a cooking class and wine tastings. The highly regarded **Wine Spectator** scores Mangiacane's 2004 Chianti Classico Reserva 86 points, and their debut 2004 Toscana Aleah, made of 100% Merlot, an impressive 90. And as the perfect complement to Mangiacane wine, the estate bottles a peppery olive oil, served and available at the villa and in many of Wolfgang Puck's restaurants. The property is set seven miles south of Florence and just short hops to nearby towns such as Siena, San Gimignano and Arezzo, making this a true Tuscan fling.

Prices range from \$2,000 to \$3,870 per person double for four nights, which covers four-course candlelight dinner, a cooking class, followed by lunch, wine and olive oil tastings, Tuscan Cookbook and bottle of Chianti and daily spa access.

Call 800-525-4800; E-mail reservation@mangiacane.com; www.mangiacane.com

\$1960 ITALY **Randonnee Tours**, renowned for creating unforgettable travel experiences for intrepid, self-guided adventurers, is introducing several new trips for 2008.

Cycling in Puglia, Italy: Stunning scenery, ancient traditions and exquisite foods are the focal points of the unforgettable journey through this distinctive region of Italy. Beginning in Monopoli and finishing seven days later in Otranto or nine days later in Lecce, the tour cycles Puglia's quiet roads through historic towns, olive groves and lush vineyards. Distinctive lodging and exclusive experiences such as pasta-making with the locals are among the features. Seven-day program costs \$1,960 per person double; \$3,260 for luxury accommodations upgrade. Call 800-242-1825; or visit www.randonneetours.com

\$2525 ITALY **Trafalgar's** new Free & Easy tour, the 11-day Great Italian Cities, gives clients three nights each in Rome, Florence and Venice for a leisurely-paced itinerary that enables clients both sightseeing and free time in Italy's most visited, romantic and historical cities.

The escorted motorcoach vacation starts in Rome with visits to the Roman Forum, the Coliseum, and the Sistine Chapel, Vatican Museums and St. Peter's Basilica; followed by a full day at leisure. In Florence, visitors get a walking tour of the city; visit the Basilica of Santa Croce and the tombs of Italy's great men, and a guided tour of the Academy of Fine Arts, including Michelangelo's David. In Venice clients take a canal cruise, get a guided walking tour of 'Secret Venice' to the Rialto Bridge and famous fish market, visit St. Mark's Square, the Byzantine Basilica, Doges' Palace, the Bridge of Sighs, and glass blowing in Murano.

Priced from \$2,525 per person double, land only, through Oct. 30, 2008.

Call 866-544-4434; www.trafalgar.com

\$2795 ENGLAND **ATP Vacations** puts an element of customization in all its tours is a new independent program that delves into the mysteries, history and royalty of Britain, and keeps participants off balance as they participate in a Murder Mystery Weekend. The 11-day "Land of Mysteries and Monarchs" includes tours of Stonehenge and the Georgian city of Bath, entry to the Tower of London, Berkeley Castle and other top ranked sites, as well as an evening exploration of old London with the highly-acclaimed Richard Jones' "Jack the Ripper" Tour (or "Ghosts of London"). The tour, offered through October, includes three- and four-star hotels, full breakfast daily, two dinners, five-day car rental, Stonehenge tour with transportation, entry fees to sites, sightseeing and airport transfers. Prices start at \$2,795 per person, double. Call 310-791-6101; e-mail: info@ATPVacations.com or visit www.ATPVacations.com

BEST BUYS

\$735 ITALY The 117-room **Four Seasons Florence** is still scheduled to open in mid-2008, is taking reservations for arrivals after July 1. Located in either the Conventino, a former convent from the 17th century, or the Palazzo Della Gherardesca, a 15th century palazzo, the Old World decor includes original frescoes and sculptured reliefs, along with an inner courtyard, an outdoor pool and an Italian spa. The property is located near the Uffizi Gallery and the Duomo. Rates start at about \$735 per night. Visit www.fourseasons.com

\$150 EUROPE **Worldhotel**, the hotel group for independent hotels and regional hotel brands, has announced a special "Stay in Europe, Pay in Dollars" promotion. The company is eliminating the euro-to-U.S.-dollar exchange rate for bookings made within the U.S. for more than 52 of its hotels and resorts located throughout Europe. For example, a U.S. traveler booking a stay for EUR 150 per night will only pay \$150 – about a 40 percent savings. The offer is valid through June 30, 2008, and is available at participating properties in Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Austria, Luxembourg, France, the Czech Republic, and Poland. The rates are commissionable to travel agents. Call 800-223-5652; www.worldhotels.com

\$558 GERMANY **Air Berlin**, Germany's second largest airline, announced its summer sale available for booking as of April 24 through June 13, 2008. Your clients will love Air Berlins award-winning service and attractive fares. Air Berlin offers the only nonstop service to Düsseldorf from Los Angeles, New York, Miami and Ft Myers. Fares are based on roundtrip travel and start as low as \$448* from New York, \$698* from Los Angeles, \$558* from Miami and \$548* from Ft Myers for travel from May 19 through June 30. These fares are also valid to most of Germany's premier cities such as Munich, Berlin, Stuttgart and Nuremberg.

GDS booking or call 866-266-5588

\$300 FRANCE **Concorde Hotels & Resorts** is making it much easier on Americans' wallets by offering a locked in U.S. dollar rate at two of its premier Parisian hotels. From July 11 through August 31, American visitors to the City of Lights can rest assured that the bulk of their money will not be spent on accommodations, but rather on enjoying Paris.

From July 11 through August 31, visitors to Paris can take advantage of a fixed US dollar rate at either the **Hotel Lutetia** or **Hotel du Louvre**. Rates begin at \$300 per night, per room per night and is only valid for American citizens since a passport will be requested upon check-in. There is no minimum stay required. At guest checkout, the amount is paid in Euros based on the currency of the day, equal to the locked in USD rate that was stated upon booking the room. The fluctuating market will not affect these rates. Call 800-888-4747; www.concorde-hotels.com/usdguaranteed

\$792 ENGLAND Celebrate retail obsession with the Shopaholics Getaway at the 425-room **Langham, London**.

Set at the pole position at the top of Regent Street, the legendary luxury hotel is home to the newly-opened glamorous Landau Restaurant, designed by David Collins Studio.

The package includes overnight accommodation for two at The Langham, London; elegant English breakfast served à la carte in The Landau; a bottle of Laurent Perrier Champagne in room on arrival; contemporary afternoon tea for two at Artesian; The Regent Street Privilege Card with 10% discounts at participating shops; and a \$99 shopping voucher for Selfridges. Priced from \$792 for double occupancy, including VAT; valid through December 2008. The **Langham London** features a series of Weekend packages available year round.

Visit www.london.langhamhotels.co.uk



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"Year of the Travel Agent" at Cable Beach

By Denise Mattia

The flight to New Providence Island left on time, the extra room between seats made for a comfortable ride and in three hours JAXFAX was in the heart of the Bahamas. Jet Blue shares top honors in the 2008 Airline Quality Rating, making their fiasco of 2007 a distant memory. Now agents can deliver the kind of service their clients expect when they book a destination. Visit www.jetblue.com.

At Nassau International Airport, journalists and travel professionals were met and transferred to the all-new Sheraton Cable Beach Resort for the grand opening celebration. Owned by Baha Mar Resorts Ltd. and managed by Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide



Inc., the Sheraton Cable Beach Resort, an \$80 million renovation of the former Radisson Hotel, includes 700 guest rooms and suites, three freshwater pools, replete with waterfalls and swim-up bars, and oversized Jacuzzis on seven acres of land in front of the 1,000-foot stretch of Nassau's Cable Beach.

Beach-inspired patterns throughout the guestrooms – all featuring balconies – lounges and restaurants add to the inviting atmosphere of the property. Participants sampled a variety of island specialties and international cuisine served at each of the six on-site restaurants.

The resort also houses 25,000 square feet of new indoor and outdoor function space, which can accommodate meetings and events of up to 1,200 attendees. The grand opening celebration – a gala affair that included executives from Starwood, Sheraton and Baha Mar, and tourism officials from the Bahamian government – was held in the largest facility – a 12,500-square-foot ballroom. Four additional breakout rooms for meetings and banquets, as well as pre-function areas for group registration, cocktail receptions and meeting breaks complement the space. All meeting facilities are equipped with the latest audiovisual equipment and high-speed Internet access. A full-service business center is also available to guests.

The Sheraton Cable Beach Resort is currently offering special "Grand Opening" all-inclusive rates for groups interested in hosting meetings or organizing events in the resort's meetings facilities. Rates start at \$349 per room per night (single occupancy) and \$509 per room per night (double occupancy). Prices include breakfast, lunch, and dinner, as well as gratuities, taxes and fees.

In addition to the special all-inclusive rate, groups booking ten rooms or more during peak nights can choose from a variety of value-added amenities ranging from food and beverage discounts and complimentary room category upgrades, to complimentary meeting space usage and private group check-in service. Options are based on group size and the number of room nights chosen. Meeting planners must book by December

21, 2008, for travel through December 21, 2008.

Travel agents are welcomed to discover this landmark resort during the all-new Sheraton Cable Beach Resort's "Year of the Travel Agent" promotion. Agents can stay for \$79 per night and receive a "buy one get one free" round of golf. The offer is valid through December 18, 2008.

Visit www.sheraton.com/cablebeachresort

Sharing Cable Beach with the Sheraton is the recently renovated Wyndham and Crystal Palace and Casino, where one evening the odds had been in favor of everyone in the group having fun. Visit www.CableBeachResorts.com

Caribbean's Largest Resort to Come

In January, 2007, Baha Mar (www.bahamar.com) signed a joint venture agreement with Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide (www.starwoodhotels.com) and Harrah's (www.harrah.com), the renowned gaming and hospitality company, to develop what will become the Caribbean's largest single destination resort.

With a completion date expected in 2012, the Harrah's new Caesars Resort Hotel will offer more than 1,000 guest rooms and a nearly 100,000-square foot casino – the largest in the Caribbean. An additional 2,000 guestrooms will be offered at the 1,000-acre mega resort that will include W Baha Mar, St. Regis Baha Mar, Westin Baha Mar and the recently completed Sheraton Cable Beach Resort.

During the final phase of development, a variety of residential spaces will be available. Also scheduled for completion at that time is a 200,000 square-foot meeting space, a second 18-hole championship golf course, 3,000 feet of continuous beachfront, a mega spa and a retail village with

upscale shopping, chef-branded restaurants, and entertainment venues. The seascapes below are as exciting as Nassau's topside appeal. The reefs are studded with sunken ships (the Bahamas sit squarely in the Bermuda Triangle), which are a favorite haunt of sharks. Stuart Cove's Dive Bahamas offers guests the opportunity to snorkel and dive with these denizens of the deep.

At Shark Alley, JAXFAX was among several divers who knelt in a semi-circle on ginger-colored sand at 40 feet with hands tucked into armpits, while the divemaster, clad in a chain-mail suit, repeatedly speared fish parts from a large box and swirled them above his head.

The ensuing scene was a tornado of several dozen large reef sharks, mouths agape, colliding with each other and the kneeling divers in an attempt to snap at the proffered meals. When the feed was over, the sharks vanished, the sand settled, and the divers searched for souvenirs – teeth shed during the fray.

Visit www.stuartcove.com



Sarah Summy & shark.

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Grand Openings and Grand Deals Spark Summer in Turks & Caicos

The Turks & Caicos Island Tourist Board recently won recognition for their website with the Webby Award. Considered by many marketing professionals as the "Oscars of the Internet" and described by the Los Angeles Times as "the only Internet award that matters," the Webby Awards have just named the official Web site of the Turks & Caicos Islands Tourist Board, www.turksandcaicostourism.com. The islands celebrate this summer with a series of developments including the grand openings of new upscale resorts, hotel property upgrades, the completion of a new marina and private airstrip, and special deals for low-season travel.

Turks & Caicos' **Third Turtle Club & Spa**, a **RockResort**, begins the season with a \$3 million beach restoration with the actual resort set to be complete in 2011. Also complete in time for summer is the **Meridian Club's** rejuvenation, and **The Sporting Club at Ambergis Cay's** private airstrip launch – the longest in the Caribbean. The very first **Nikki Beach Resort and Leeward Marina** debuted to accommodate mega yachts for the first time in the destination's history. As summer arrives, the Islands will heat up with the opening of **Seven Stars Resort** on Grace Bay Beach, voted "world's leading beach" for the past three years by World Travel Awards.

"We are truly excited for the coming months and happenings in the Turks & Caicos Islands," said Ralph Higgs, director of tourism, marketing, for the Turks & Caicos Tourist Board. "This growth affords our islands the ability to accommodate guests seeking the ultimate in luxury vacation travel, renowned resorts, and outstanding amenities. Our latest developments will uniquely cater to an affluent group of visitors looking to travel by private plane or mega yacht."

Latest Developments & Deals

Turtle Club & Spa, a **RockResort** began its \$3 million renourishment project on Babalua Beach in Providenciales. Designed to replenish Babalua Beach, the project will widen the existing beach to ensure Babalua Beach will be around for future guests to enjoy. The project is being overseen by the Department of Environment and Coastal Resources and Oceanpoint Development Ltd. A third Turtle Club & Spa is scheduled to open in 2011.

Visit www.thirdturtleclub.rockresorts.com

The **Sands at Grace Bay**, one of Providenciales' original resorts, has recently completed a \$6 million renovation, repositioning it in the four-star category. Two deals are: Guests receive a 7th night free on stays completed through Nov. 1st – Dec. 20 while a second suite deal rewards guests with a 6th night free when booking a 5-night stay or a 6th and 7th night free when booking a 6-night stay. Valid through Oct. 31. Visit www.thesandstc.com

The **Meridian Club** on Pine Cay, just completed restoration of



12 rooms and a single cottage on Pine Cay and the additional of four new boats. Rates begin at \$715 for a Beach Club Front Room, through July 31, 2008. Visit www.meridianclub.com or www.maacg.com

The **Leeward Marina**, which opened April 5 on Providenciales, is the first eco-marina in the Atlantic Ocean. **Nikki Beach Resort** and **Island Global Yachting** have come

together to design and build a 110-slip marina that can service yachts up to 200 feet. Most importantly, this marina will exceed the guidelines established by Blue Flag Marina Criteria in order to preserve the surrounding marine life. Visit www.leeward.com

The **Grace Bay Club** now boasts an additional 38-ultra spacious suites at the Villas at Grace Bay Club, the world's first Infiniti Edge Bar and a collection of contemporary refinements to beachfront eateries Anacaona and Grill Rouge. Grace Bay Club is currently developing The Estate, a collection of 22 custom-designed ultra-elegant residences that will be available in December 2008 along with private beach cabanas. Visit www.gracebayclub.com

Nikki Beach Resort just celebrated its grand opening with an over-the-top party that has come to define Nikki Beach. The \$100 million resort opened with 48 rooms in its first phase, coinciding with the opening of Leeward Marina. Phase Two to open in 2010, will add an additional 110-room resort, casino and spa. Rates begin at \$750. Guests who book by June 30, 2008 will receive 30 percent off of nightly room rates on travel through Sept. 30, 2008. Visit www.nikkibeachhotels.com and enter code GOSPEC.

The long awaited **Seven Stars Resort** debuts on July 1, 2008, by offering an additional 25 percent off its low season summer rates. Seven Stars will bring the price of Garden View One Bedroom Studio accommodations to \$247 per room from July 1 – Oct. 31, 2008. Seven Stars Resort features a full-service spa, inviting pool, children's play area, fine dining opportunities, and a boutique for the vacation shopper. Visit www.sevenstarsresort.com

Sparkling with Music & Cultural Fest

The Tourist Board of the Turks & Caicos Islands, announced the lineup for its fifth **Turks & Caicos Music and Cultural Festival** from **July 28 – Aug. 4, 2008** is the stage for stellar performances by some of today's hottest R&B artists including Ne-Yo and T-Pain. The Turks & Caicos Music and Cultural Festival's superstar line-up includes Lionel Richie, Academy Award and GRAMMY award-winner; eight-time GRAMMY award-winning soul singer, Anita Baker; T-Pain, Ne-Yo and LL Cool J, all GRAMMY award-winning rappers; JT Taylor, former lead singer for Kool & The Gang; Russell Thompkins & The New Stylistics, famed Philadelphia soul group; Lou Gramm, vocalist from the rock band Foreigner; and local Turks & Caicos artists.

For information, contact the Turks & Caicos Islands Tourist Board, 800-241-0824; www.turksandcaicostourism.com

DR's Five-Star Race

The Dominican Republic is one of the newest hot spots in the Caribbean for travel. Among the newest luxury resorts in the DR, are Maxim Bungalows and The Westin Roco Ki Beach & Golf Resort, the latter is scheduled to open this fall in Punta Cana. Additionally, new year-round air service from JetBlue will bring the DR closer to the Big Apple.

While maintaining its popularity among vacationers worldwide, the Dominican Republic (DR) has taken its tourism efforts to a new level through its recent collaboration with **JetBlue Airways**, which became the only carrier to provide nonstop, daily year-round service between New York's John F. Kennedy Airport (JFK) and Puerto Plata's Gregorio Luperon International Airport as of Jan., 2008. With regular fares between New York and Puerto Plata starting at \$109 each way, the new service makes it easy and cost effective for those coming from JFK Airport.

"We are very excited about JetBlue's new service to Puerto Plata and welcome travelers to discover the incredible beauty of our North Coast," said Luis Simo, vice minister of tourism. "This new route will positively impact not only tourism and real estate development in this area, but will also provide Puertoplantans living in the U.S. a convenient and economical opportunity to return home."

Agent Opinion

"Punta Cana continues to be a great value for an all-inclusive destination," notes Crystal, Minn-based Steve Phillips, among the **Carlson Wagonlit Travel** experts who were recently polled about the outlook for the Caribbean.

"However, the American tourist is used to a certain type of destination ... [with] some of the comforts of home. The Dominican Republic has struggled to acquire and build an infrastructure to support American tourists. Therefore, after going there once, clients are not as likely to want go back, even though they feel they received great value for their vacation dollar."

But things are changing rapidly in the Dominican Republic, with a slew of upscale properties – from brands like **Westin**, **Ritz-Carlton**, and **Four Seasons** – poised to transform the image of Punta Cana.

For example, the Caribbean will welcome its very first **Heavenly Spa by Westin**, which will be unveiled at The **Westin Roco Ki Beach & Golf Resort** when it opens fall 2008 in Punta Cana. The 11,500 square foot Heavenly Spa will offer a sanctuary of 15 spacious and sumptuously designed treatment rooms and an infinity pool with inspiring views of the ocean and Macao Beach which has been praised as one of the most exceptional in the world by UNESCO for its pristine white sand and crystal clear waters.

The Faldo Legacy Course is the first of up to four championship courses that will comprise The Roco Ki Golf Club.

Maxim Bungalows is located in Cofresi Beach, on the country's north coast in the Puerto Plata region, and in Juan Dolio, on the south coast, close to the capital city Santo Domingo. The Cofresi Beach location opened March 15,

2008 while the Juan Dolio property is slated to open in September. Adventurous clients looking for an exhilarating action-packed getaway will revel in the Maxim Bungalows Adventure package. Four nights' accommodation starts at \$1,699 per couple. The Girls Weekend Escape package is \$299 per night per person double. Call 866-970-3364; www.MaximBungalows.com

Posh tour operator, **Island Vacation** offers a \$100 air credit, per person when a spacious junior suite is booked for a four-night getaway. A "Spa Prelude" including an herbal wrap and choice of sea salt or sugar body scrub (30 minutes) will prepare duos for the "Togetherness" treatment, which features a "Serenity Soak," followed by a 50-minute couple's massage. Priced from \$1,985 per room, based on double occupancy, inclusive of airport transfers, for travel through Dec. 21, 2008. Call 877-903-2525; www.islanddestinations.com

For more information, contact the Dominican Republic Tourist Office, 888-374-6361; www.godominicanrepublic.com



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IN THE NEWS

Romancing to a New Rhythm

Antigua and Barbuda is bracing for a downpour of love with the launch of its first **International Music Festival, Romantic Rhythms** June 12 – 15, 2008. The Ministry of Tourism and its travel partners will launch a special promotion called "Kiss and Make Up in Antigua and Barbuda" that offers great summer rates and range of special packages that include air, accommodations, concert tickets and other entertainment. Visitors can also enjoy a \$100 credit to be used towards this romantic experience.

Singles, couples, honeymooners, and anyone looking to rekindle their relationship can enjoy great savings and an intimate opportunity to be pampered, sample exotic cuisine, experience unique heritage and cultural attractions. The entire destination will be transformed into a love shack with two main concerts at the scenic Sir Vivian Richards Stadium, as well as mini concerts at other intimate settings throughout the twin islands. The performers Brian McKnight, Keyshia Cole, Shaggy and Maxi Priest. **Delta Air Lines** begins non-stop service from New York's JFK on June 12 with service on Thursdays and Sundays.

Visit www.antiguamusicfestival.com

Agent and Client Deals at Almonds

The **Almond Resorts'** new **Casuarina Beach Resort** in Barbados welcomed its first guests on May 1, 2008. Formerly known as the **Casuarina Beach Resort**, Almond acquired it in 2005; and it has been closed since then while undergoing a \$30-million refurbishment and expansion.

The resort opened with the original renovated 200 rooms located in the gardens, while the new block along the beach includes 100 additional rooms plus an additional swimming pool.

Team Almond agents are eligible to visit and stay at the property for a special introductory all-inclusive rate of \$50 per person per night, which remains valid for travel until June 30, and if agents are not members of Team Almond, they can opt to sign up.

Almond Casuarina Beach Resort has a special opening rate this summer, of \$568 per person, all-inclusive, for a three-night stay, two-island trip. Guests staying at Almond Casuarina Beach are invited to experience two Almond Resorts in Barbados **Almond Beach Club** or **Almond Morgan Bay Beach Resort** or **Almond Smugglers Cove** in St. Lucia.

Call 800-4ALMOND or visit www.almondresorts.com

Agent Commissions: 20%

World Explorer Tours has two unique programs to the island. One for families and one for adults. Agents can earn up to 20% commission on these programs.

The nine-day Family Adventure tour includes white water rafting, hiking in rain forests, swimming with Dolphins, this is an action packed vacation. Clients will explore the diverse landscape and culture while enjoying the comfort of top hotels and rustic lodges. Participants visit Santo Domingo,

the mountains and the Puerto Plata (North Coast) area. Fully escorted from arrival to Santo Domingo with prices starting at \$1,295 for adults and \$295 for children

The adult-only nine-day Tropical Adventure Tour includes a look at the nightlife in Santo Domingo, where you can dance the night away (free meringue lessons), white water rafting, horseback riding, mountain biking, hiking or simply relaxing in a natural environment, it's yours to experience. This program is fully escorted upon arrival in Santo Domingo. Prices start at \$1,095 per person double.

Call 888-999-2354; www.worldexploretours.com

Martinique Mourns Poet and Politician

The **Martinique Promotion Bureau/CMT USA** is mourning the loss of the Isle of Flowers' favorite son, Aimé Césaire, who passed away in the island's capital city of Fort-de-France at the age of 94. Poet, playwright and politician, Césaire is hailed as a principal crusader for civil rights within the French West Indies, both through his writings and in his 55 years serving as the Mayor of Fort-de-France.

Muriel Wiltord, director Americas for the Martinique Promotion Bureau /CMT USA, said, "It is a sad day for Martinique as we've lost a true statesman, and arguably the person most responsible for the island's success today. Césaire's influence extended well beyond our shores, inspiring black people everywhere to take pride in their heritage, while also spearheading the effort to make all former French colonies departments of France. His impact is immeasurable and lives on forever."

In recognition of his great contributions to Martinique and French society, Martinique's International Airport was renamed Martinique Aimé Césaire International Airport in his honor in January 2007. Visit www.martinique.org

IN FLIGHT

American will begin daily service from Miami to Antigua on Nov. 20. The new service complements existing flights to Antigua from San Juan offered by **American** and **American Eagle**.

American will launch nonstop service from Miami to Grenada on Nov. 20. The flight will operate daily during the winter season through mid-April and drop to five days a week for the rest of the year. The carrier's regional subsidiary, **American Eagle**, has a daily flight year-round to Grenada from San Juan. Visit www.aa.com

Delta will launch daily nonstop service from Atlanta to Santiago, Dominican Republic, on Dec. 20. The service will complement Delta's existing daily nonstop flights to the Dominican Republic between Atlanta and Santo Domingo, Puerto Plata and Punta Cana. Santiago is located in the Cibao Valley, south of Puerto Plata.

Visit www.delta.com **Spirit Airlines** will launch daily service June 12 between Fort Lauderdale and Port of Spain, Trinidad, marking Spirit's 22nd Caribbean/Latin American destination. Visit www.spirit.com

BEST BUYS

\$145 ST. LUCIA

Coco Palm Hotel, St. Lucia's chicest boutique hotel is offering up to 40% percent off all accommodations through August 15, 2008 when travelers book by June 30, 2008. Accommodations are key to value in St. Lucia and Coco Palms is the ideal gateway to the best that St. Lucia has to offer. Coco Palm is known for its personalized service and unbeatable rates. Rates start at just \$145 per night this summer season and sets travelers right in the heart of Rodney Bay Village. Rodney Bay Village is ideal for travelers who want to feel like a native St. Lucian as tourists and locals drink, dance, and dine together. Among the hotel's signature features are swim-up rooms that allow guests to literally step into the free form swimming pool from their terraces. The hotel also offers Rodney Bay Village's hottest restaurant, Ti Bananne Caribbean Bistro & Bar. Ti Bananne overlooks the pool and boasts light Caribbean Creole fare and nightly entertainment in an alfresco dining setting. Visit www.coco-resorts.com.

\$599 BVI (TORTOLA)

This Father's Day, instead of yet another tie to politely tuck into his closet, consider giving your father a Mai Tai in the BVI (British Virgin Islands). The casually-elegant, plantation-style **Long Bay Beach Resort & Villas'** three-night "Explore the BVI" package makes a great gift for busy dads, who can book this relaxing Caribbean discovery getaway any time between now and December 20, 2008.

Priced at \$599 per person based on double occupancy, the package features a fun-filled island-hopping day sail to neighboring islands on the lovely "Mystique" with lunch, open bar and snorkeling. Also included are Hillside Oceanview Deluxe accommodations; full American breakfasts daily; a one-day car rental on Tortola; and tax and service charges. Additional nights are available priced at \$175 per night.

Call 800-345-0356; www.eliteislands.com.

\$163 TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

On June 12, **Spirit Airlines** will launch new non-stop service from Fort Lauderdale International Airport to Piarco International Airport in Trinidad. As the first budget carrier to offer service to the destination, Flight 949 will depart Ft. Lauderdale at 8:55 p.m. and arrive Port of Spain at 12:30 a.m. The return Flight 948 will depart Port of Spain at 1:30 a.m. and arrive Ft. Lauderdale at 5:30 a.m.

Trinidad and Tobago has long been revered as one of the Caribbean's most sought after hidden gems. With exotic tropical landscape and its multi-dimensional cultural element, the dual island nation consistently offers visitors something other than just sun, sand and sea. The destination features a wide variety of off-the-beaten path activities including diving, bird watching, and hiking as well as dynamic festivals and events. To celebrate the new service, Spirit Airlines is offering special roundtrip from \$163 for travel by October 10, 2008. Visit www.spiritair.com For information on Trinidad and Tobago, call 800-816-7541; www.goTrinidadandTobago.com

\$32K TURKS & CAICOS

Grace Bay Club located in Turks and Caicos is offering two special summer packages: Summer Special and Experience the Penthouse at Grace Bay Club available from June 1, 2008 to December 20, 2008. Summer travelers who book the five-night Summer Special package, will receive the sixth night free when booking a one bedroom suite or higher room category. This package also includes one complimentary dinner for two as well as a choice of a round of golf or a therapeutic massage per adult. Secondly, the four-night Experience the Penthouse at Grace Bay Club package was created as the perfect quick and luxurious getaway.

Through October 31, 2008 rates start from \$23,300 in a Penthouse Suite and \$32,000 in a Grace Bay Penthouse Suite. Rates start from \$26,900 during the period of November 1 to December 20, 2008 in a Penthouse Suite and \$38,300 in a Grace Bay Penthouse Suite. Packages can be booked back to back for longer stays. All suites have ocean front views, air conditioning, ceiling fans, direct dial telephones, hi speed wireless internet access throughout the resort, 60-channel cable TV with DVD/CD player, safes, refrigerators with ice makers, Egyptian cotton linens and featherbeds, bathrobes, and master baths with bathtubs.

Call 800-946-5757; www.gracebayclub.com

Report from Tianguis, Mexico's Marketplace

Buyers crowded around festooned booths, rummaging over counters piled high with fruits from the sea such as at the Mazatlan booth, a region known for its sport-fishing and delicious shrimp and lobster or coffees or chocolates, as buyers pored over catalogs describing the upcoming year's worth of projects and products. Suppliers seated at desks or counters called out to friends, colleagues, luring them with the best arguments for doing business with them comparing competitors' prices and values with their own.

The scenes repeat themselves as more than 500 exhibitors occupied 430 booths and about 1,100 buyers from 28 countries participated, 57% of them international and 43% of Mexican origin, at the 33rd edition of Tiaquis



Acapulco Bay's Skyline

Turistico, easily Mexico's largest travel marketplace and is considered the seventh biggest worldwide.

Organizers estimated that during the three-day event, more than 22,000 business meetings took place (13% more than last year) while no dollar figure emerged by the end of the show to indicate the actual business transactions. Nearly \$3 billion were invested in tourism-industry-related projects during the first quarter of

2008, or 40% more than during the same period in 2007, according to government figures. The goal for the current federal administration, which concludes the end of 2012, is \$20 billion.

Tianguis opened at the **Mundo Imperiale** on April 13 with **Guerrero Gov. Zeferino Torreblanca Galindo**, **Tourism Secretary Rodolfo Elizondo Torres** and **CPTM Director-General Oscar Fitch Gomez** addressing a growing crowd at Acapulco's Diamante or Diamond Zone. The Diamante Zone is a new district under development that is being earmarked as the next meeting destination as a new glass-walled Convention Center was formally introduced during Tianguis. Adjacent to it is an 800-room convention hotel under construction, both establishments are distant from Acapulco's chaotic, frenzied and lovable downtown, where the current 40-year old Convention Center now stands, one that has garnered a great deal of affection from Tianguis participants.

As the event drew to a close attendees speculated that it may have taken place for the last at the Acapulco Convention Center and possibly the last in Acapulco. Those in favor of keeping Tianguis in the heart of the city, point out that Acapulco is easily accessible, and that hotels are located within minutes of the convention center.

Capital Investments

Mexican **President, Felipe Calderon** closed the 33rd annual Tanguis Turistico in Acapulco by reasserting that his government plans to convert Mexico into one of the biggest power players in the tourism industry. Calderon plans to invest in infrastructure to attract more foreign investment, diversify destination offerings, expand Internet facilities and reinforce security.

He also mentioned that in 2007, an additional 100,000 foreign tourists visited Mexico compared with the previous year, and that in 2007, the economic influx was \$700 million more than in 2006. Likewise, he emphasized that in the first 16 months of his government, the private foreign investment in tourism was over \$5,500 million; half the amount



MEXICO: NTO

collected in the previous six years.

Among the outstanding seminars was one that focused on North American travel to Mexico. The Secretary of Tourism of Mexico, Rodolfo Elizondo Torres, headed during the 33rd Tianguis Turístico, the "North American Market Trends" discussion forum, in which six specialists stressed to the public and private sectors the importance of boosting investments boost in this market.

Led by the head of Sector, Elizondo, other members included Sarita Skidmore, President of MENLO Consulting and expert in Travel Style studies; Peter Yesawich, President and General Director of Yesawich, Pepperdine & Brown and specialist in advertising and tourism trends; Viviana Rojas, academic in the University of Texas and investigator in retirement tourism, "baby boomer" phenomenon, and second residencies in Mexico; Ray Snisky, President of Mark Travel Corporation; Michael Pusateri, Executive Strategy Consultant of Vantage Strategy and Deborah Sexton, President and General Director of Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA).

Below are just a few of the highlights from Tianguis. JF will continue to follow up with reports in future issues.

States of Mexico

MAZATLAN: With an ad budget that has leaped to \$5.5 million to promote the State in the U.S. and \$8.5 million overall, the policies for the State of Mazatlan are ambitious. Dubbed the "Pearl of the Pacific," Mazatlán has more than 90 hotel and condominium properties, including nearly 50 four and five-star resorts. The destination expects to have more than 10,000 hotel rooms available throughout the city by yearend, compared to 9,400 in 2007. That's good news for the 3,767,476 visitors expected here this year, up 9 percent from 3,456,400 in 2007.

OAXACA: Among the best-known tourist destinations in the State of Oaxaca are Huatulco, and the city of Oaxaca, also known as one of Mexico's 35 Magic Cities. Tourism Minister of Oaxaca, Beatriz Rodriguez Casanovas said among the State's goals is to increase the quantity and quality of the tourism product at Huatulco including adding a variety of water-based eco tourism activities. Rodriguez Casanovas mentioned that the State is welcoming new properties such as the 951-room La Esperanza, an additional 128 rooms at the Hotel Gala, AMRresorts will add 393 rooms. In total new construction work will yield Oaxaca a total of 1,877 rooms. Additionally, an extension of the local airport runway and the construction of additional terminal facilities is expected to attract more air service, and Mexican

Mexico's President Felipe Calderon closed the 33rd annual Tianguis Turistico in Acapulcoconvert the country into one of the biggest power players in the tourism industry.

de Aviacion increased flights to Oaxaca City.

PUERTO VALLARTA: "Where Mexico Comes to Life," is the marketing line for this State which has lately begun a multi-million dollar restoration of its Old Town. Oscar Abel Rivero Estrada, President of Puerto Vallarta Tourism Board, mentioned the area has become appealing for special events such as the upcoming qualifier soccer match among Mexico, Costa Rica, El Salvador and the U.S. as well as attracting a series of new arts festivals. News for agents is the chance to become a PV Expert – see Jax Fax, Dec. issue, p. 40 for details or visit, www.visitpuertovallarta.com

YUCATAN: The Costa Maya, a cruise port on Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, will be operational by next month, ahead of schedule. Due to Hurricane Dean, the port was heavily hit in August 2007. Costa Maya now says that two berths will be ready by July and that its third will be ready by November. Costa Maya said reconstructed berths could accommodate the newest and largest cruise ships entering the market in the next few years, including **Norwegian Cruise Line's** F3-class ships and **Royal Caribbean's** Genesis-class ships. Port executives said that **Cunard, Princess, Celebrity, NCL, Royal Caribbean, Holland America, Carnival, Regent Seven Seas, P&O, Disney, Windstar, MSC and Ocean Village** have committed to return to Costa Maya.



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SOUTH & CENTRAL AMERICA

A new boardwalk, lined with beach houses, small hotels and restaurants, will be ready in time for the port's reopening; it represents a \$15 million government investment.

The Mexican Caribbean island of Cozumel continues to rank high as a top destination and was rated at the fastest growing international beach destination by Orbitz and a one of the top five dive destinations in the Caribbean.

Air Access

New air service from Europe (Madrid and London) has raised the island's profile on the international scene while new and increased domestic airlift links the island with Mexico City more frequently on **Mexicana Airline's Click** and **Vivaaerobus**, a low cost carrier, now provides direct service from Monterrey to the island thrice weekly. New airline operator **Mayir** now offers daily shuttle service between Cancun and Cozumel, four times daily; and **Mayfair** also operates flights from Cozumel to Chichen Itza, declared one of the new Seven Wonders of the World last year.

Direct flights to Cozumel out of the U.S. are as follows: Atlanta (**Delta**), Charlotte (**USAirways**), Denver (**Frontier Airlines**), Dallas (**American**), Houston (**Continental**), Miami (**American Eagle**) and Newark (**Continental**).

Shortly after Tianguis closed, **Rubén Beltrán Guerrero**, Mexico's Consul General to New York, joined **Mariana Pedrero**, Director of the Mexico Tourism Board's New York Office, and **Juan Antonio Meza**, Mexicana's East Coast Zone Manager celebrated the arrival of **Mexicana Airlines'** Airbus A319, the airline's new direct service between Monterrey, Nuevo Leon and New York which started May 1.

The aircraft departs Monterrey's International Airport at 8:00 a.m. and lands at JFK at 1:00 p.m. The aircraft, has 12 seats in the airline's award-winning Clase Ejecutiva and 108 in coach class and returned to Monterrey at 2:00 p.m. arriving at 5:30 p.m.

Hotel Developments

Azul Hotels by Karisma, a premier collection of Gourmet Inclusive® properties located throughout the Riviera Maya recently joined forces with the Sensatori collection by TUI AG, the largest tourism and services group in the world, unveiling Azul Sensatori Hotel. Opening in October 2008, Azul Sensatori Hotel will be the first Sensatori resort in the Americas located in the Riviera Maya. Call 888-280-8810; www.azulhotel.com.

Mexican-owned **Camino Real** plans to open two more hotels in Mexico City, plus others in Puebla, Leon, Hermosillo and Xalapa this year. All will be owned by the firm and will be full service hotels catering to business travelers. Their goal is to have 37 Camino Real hotels.

City Express, which operates 26 low-priced hotels around Mexico, has announced the creation of City Express junior, where rooms will be cheaper still. City Express rates vary from destination to destination, but average about 60 dollars per night. At City Express Junior, the tariff will be about 45 dollars per night.

El Cid Resorts's CEO Carlos Berdegue reported new investments in Porto Morelos Marin, which will include a

300-room hotel and a convention center. Additionally, he said the independent hotel firm would be developing 117 rooms in Cozumel, at a cost of \$25 million while in Mazatlan the company expects to increase exponentially and in Cancun an additional 300 rooms will be added. El Cid Resorts recently joined the Mayan Alliance, is developing spas, and is close to announcing new development with marinas, golf, horseback riding facilities and hotels along the Pacific shore. www.elcidresorts.com

Hilton's Andy Slater, Vice President of the Hilton brand, reported the company now counts some 18 properties in Mexico for a total of 3,600 rooms. Slater mentioned Hilton's \$210 million increased investment will see several new properties added to its portfolio; the company credits itself with adding 1,700 to 2,000 jobs in Mexico making Hilton the number one hotel developer in the country.

Inter-Continental will more than double that, planning an investment of 515 million dollars to add 63 new properties in Mexico, most of them economical Holiday Inn Express.

Posadas de Mexico, best known for its **Fiesta Americanas** and **Fiesta Inn**, has launched a low-tariff chain with hotels called **One. Accor**, which plans to expand in Mexico, announced that almost all its hotels will be low-rate **Ibis**.

According to top executives at **Preferred Hotel Group**, Mexico is a key market for huge growth. Announced recently, was the addition of eight new member properties for an additional inventory of 2,343 rooms in Mexico, which now totals 24 hotels and 4,960 rooms. Comprised of five brands, Preferred Hotels® & Resorts, Preferred Boutique™, Summit Hotels & Resorts™, Sterling Hotels and Historic Hotels of America. www.preferredresidences.com

Real Resorts' Royal in Cancun, the brand that represents the company's adult-only, five-star all-inclusive property, is planning to further spoil its guests with new enhancements announced at Tianguis. The Royal in Cancun features 285 suites in six categories from ocean view Junior Suites to one-bedroom oceanfront Royal Presidential Suites and Cancun's first beachfront Royal Swim-Up Master Suites. Call 800-543-7556; www.realresorts.com

Sol Melia's Guy Hensley, Area VP Premium Brands and Vicente Madriga, Director of Sales of Premium Brands were on hand to discuss that the new brand launched in Cancun and Cabo in late 2007, ME is among the 10 most expensive properties in Mexico. The Gran Melia Cancun, had a multi-million renovation. Its ME brand, such as the ME Cabo completed a multi-million dollar renovation in 2007.

Wyndham Hotel Group announced an agreement to develop a **Wingate by Wyndham** hotel in Chihuahua, Mexico, which will become the brand's first property outside North America when it opens later this year.

For more information, contact the Mexico Tourist Board, www.visitmexico.com

Obispado Museo in Monterrey



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(www.grandholidays.net)

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(www.picassotravel.com)

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(www.premiergateway.com)

SKY BIRD TRAVEL
(www.skybird-travel.com)

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BEST BUYS

\$995 COSTA RICA

Legendary **Caravan Tours** is selling a 10-day Costa Rica Natural Paradise tour for \$995 per person double, which includes all meals, all activities, all accommodations, all airport transfers, all transportation and excursions. A professional tour director accompanies participants for the entire tour.

From a two-night stay in San Jose where guests will visit the mile-wide crater, Poas Volcano, dormant since 1991, San José's Plaza de la Cultura, Central Park and the National Theatre. Following a morning drive through Braulio Carrillo Park, guests will glide through the jungle canopy on the world famous rainforest aerial tram, and take a short rainforest hike. An afternoon boat excursion into Tortuguero Park provides a close up look at otters, turtles and manatees. Besides visiting the Green Turtle Research Station where participants learn about efforts to protect the turtle's nesting habitat, eggs and young hatchlings, they will walk along the Atlantic turtle nesting beaches with a naturalist guide.

Other highlights include a Pacific Coast drive, a hike in the Cloud Forest, visit to a coffee plantation in Sarchi before heading back to San Jose. Caravan has scheduled almost weekly departures through December.

Call 800-Caravan; www.caravan.com



The South & Central American Travel Association (SATA) is a non-profit association that promotes the wonders of Latin America and the most experienced and established USA based travel suppliers.

The goal and purpose of SATA is to provide and improve tourism by bringing awareness and education of South & Central America to travel agents throughout the United States. Our members are committed to the education and promotion of these specialized destinations and promise to be very resourceful to travel agents.

SATA Supplier Members comprise Airlines, Cruise Expedition operators, Hotels, Media Boosters, Tour Operators and Tourist Boards.

For more information, visit us online at www.sata-usa.com

**\$105 MEXICO**

Combining a touch of elegance, a hint of indulgence, and the lure of a tropical paradise, the all-inclusive **Sandos Hotels & Resorts** with three properties on the Riviera Maya, Mexico, offers a Romantic Package for couples looking to spend quality time with that "special someone." Available at no extra cost in all upgraded room categories, the Romantic Package is available year-round at each of the three all-inclusive Sandos properties in Mexico. Among the inclusions are: en-suite romantic toast each evening, romantic dinner for two in an a-la-carte restaurant; a 15% spa discount that can be used throughout the stay on all treatments; a 10% discount on motorized sports including banana boat rides, jet skiing and parasailing and a framed photo of the couple. Sample rates for standard rooms start at \$105 per person, per day based on double occupancy. Upgraded rooms start at \$120 per person, per night, based on double occupancy.

Call 866-887-5601; www.sandoshotels.com

\$257 MEXICO

Aqua Cancun is offering 25% off the nightly rate with rooms starting at \$247 per night plus 25% off Food and Beverage plus 25% off Spa services all throughout the stay through September 16, 2008. This captivating resort possesses all of the ingredients for an invigorating and relaxing getaway with amenities such as three distinguished restaurants (MB Restaurant, Siete and Azur); Spa Aqua, offering a multitude of multi-sensory treatments firmly rooted in the Mayan culture as well as relaxation techniques perfected across the globe; and a selection of tranquil cabanas including beach cabanas, pool cabanas and swing cabanas. Must be booked by August 31, 2008.

Call 866-931-AQUA; www.fiestamericana.com

\$980 COSTA RICA

Playa Nicuesa Rainforest Lodge four to seven-day packages include a four-hour hike to a waterfall in the rainforest, a two-hour inshore fishing tour, kayak and snorkel tours, and nocturnal rainforest hikes as well as educational tours. Also included is a choice of the Golfo Dulce Boat and Dolphin Tour or the Esquinas River Jungle Tour. Local naturalist guides lead all tours. The lodge's five cabins including two deluxe family cabins offer comfort and privacy for families. The Mango Guesthouse, with four rooms, is suitable for large groups and extended families.

Priced from \$980 per person double for four nights in the Green Season (May – Sept. 30), to \$1,700 per person double for seven nights based on double occupancy during high season (Nov. 30– April 30, 2009); children 6-12 receive 25% discount on package rates; teenagers 13-17 receive a 10% discount on family package.

Included are accommodations in private cabins or in the Mango Guest House (all have private terraces), canopied beds, private hot water open-air garden shower and ceiling fans; all meals and snacks.

Call 866-504-8116; www.Nicuesalodge.com

IN THE NEWS

Jet Blue Launches Brazilian Carrier

David Neeleman, the chairman and founder of JetBlue, plans to start up his fourth airline, a domestic carrier in Brazil. Neeleman, who was born in Brazil, has raised \$150 million to finance the carrier, which doesn't have a name yet. The airline, to be based in Sao Paulo, plans to commence operations in early 2009 and ultimately serve most major markets in Brazil by 2013 with as many as 76 new Embraer aircraft.

The startup has placed an aircraft order for 36 Embraer E195 jets, with options for another 20 and purchase rights for a further 20. The firm orders are valued at \$1.4 billion. The order, if all options and purchase rights are exercised, is valued at \$3 billion. The jets will seat 118 passengers in a two-by-two configuration. Every seat will have LiveTV satellite television.

"Our target market is the 150 million passengers who travel annually by long-distance bus as well as those who, for lack of a convenient alternative, don't travel at all," said Neeleman. "We respect TAM and GOL as well-run companies with deep pockets. We believe, however, that the Brazilian market is ready for a third major airline and that there is sufficient untapped potential to support all of us."

Visit www.jetblue.com

Ultimate Jet Pays Ultimate 12%

Ultimate Jet Vacations (UJV) announces an innovative solution for private aviation and luxury travel. After years of servicing the most demanding clientele, UJV learned how difficult it is for the travel agency community to understand and deal with the rapidly growing market of private aviation where there is no set pricing and usually no commissions. Therefore, they created a new concept that's determined to change the way travel agencies fulfill their clients' demands.

Ultimate Jet Vacations is a new luxury tour operator developed as the results of blending in-depth knowledge of the luxury resort market, and expertise in private aviation.

One of the best selling packages is the South Florida-Caribbean getaway (with departures every Thursday and Sunday. Starting prices for Private Jet Vacation Packages is under \$1,000 per night per person based on quad.

UJV prides itself by being the first tour operator to work solely with travel agencies, assisting in organizing custom-made, private aviation packages from beginning to end. This includes private jet transportation, luxury accommodations, in-ground private transfers, exclusive tour activities, restaurant reservations, tee times, and more; while offering travel agent commissions of up to 12%. Call 800-231-4095; E-mail info@ultimatejetvacations.com

<p>Lima and Machu Picchu Airline ticket by LAN PERU + 02 Nights in Lima + 03 Nights in Cuzco City Tour + Tour to the Sacred Valley lunch included + Tour to Machu Picchu vistadome train lunch included From \$ 1074.00</p>	<p>Best of Argentina Airline ticket by LAN ARGENTINA 03 Nights in Buenos Aires + 03 Nights in Bariloche + 02 Nights in Iguazu Falls + City tour, tour to the falls + Tango dinner show and more From \$ 1399.00</p>
<p>Easter Island and Chilean wines Airline Ticket by LAN CHILE 03 Nights in Santiago + 03 Nights in Easter Island + tours to Moai route, Hanga Roa volcano, Ahu Akivi caves, Orongo Cultural Center, Concha y Toro, Undurraga and Cousino Macul Wineries, Wine Testing, City tour, and much more. From \$ 1886.00</p>	<p>All fares are net per pax. Includes airline tickets from Miami. Subject to change and availability. Flights from more than 30 other cities available. Some restrictions apply. Queues and taxes not included.</p> <p>Contact us at : 1-866-307-4074 or visit our web page www.latinamericantravelclub.com</p>

Streamlining the China Odyssey

China is forever linked to its ancient civilization and many of the world's most revered treasures, such as The Great Wall, Terra-Cotta Warriors and Horseshoes and the Yangtze River. Today, travelers can also find spectacular architecture and towering skylines in Shanghai and Beijing (site of the Summer Olympics), as well as a wealth of luxury accommodations and sample regional cuisines.

Skyscraper "Envy"

In a case of skyscraper envy, officials in Shanghai are planning to build the world's tallest building, despite the fact that they're still working on their other big project, the Shanghai World Financial Centre (which was set to become the world's tallest building at 492 meters when it was designed in 1997, but has since been dwarfed by other monoliths). The planned Shanghai Centre, not to be confused with the existing building of the same name, will stand almost 1,800 feet high – about 210 feet taller than the Taipei 101 Tower (at about 1,500 feet), currently the tallest building in Asia. Shanghai officials are counting on the fact that the Burj Dubai, also under development, will not meet its rumored 2,400 feet high target.

Shanghai's Runway Success

Recently, Shanghai and Beijing welcomed new additions to their international airports. The third runway at Shanghai Pudong International Airport is able to handle the Airbus A380, the world's largest passenger plane. With the addition, the airport can now accommodate up to 60 million passengers annually. Meanwhile, the sleek, Norman Foster-designed Terminal 3 at Beijing Capital International Airport opened its doors just three months ago.

Free for All

And finally, visitors are now able to traipse through state-run museums throughout China without having to dip into their wallets. In an attempt to expose more people to the wonders of history, the Chinese government has said that it will foot the museums' maintenance bills. That won't come cheap: China has more than 2,300 museums, which received some 150 million visitors in 2007.

Sita World Tours sells two outstanding programs to China: the 13-day Best of China with a Yangtze River Cruise and a 10-day program that includes a trip to Hong Kong.

The 13-day option, priced at \$1,840 per person double for land arrangements only, tours the Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square the Summer Palace in Beijing and the Great Wall outside the city enhanced with a Yangtze River Cruise. For the 10-day program, starting at \$2,390, participants visit the famous travel icons of China in Beijing, Xi'an and Shanghai with the added sparkle of Hong Kong. **Call 800-421-5643; www.sitatours.com**

Goway's Asia 2008/9 brochure features 20 countries, a mixture of the familiar and a range of new products. "This brochure



is one of Goway's most exciting Asia travel planners yet", says Doug Vogl, Product and Marketing Manager for Asia. "We have expanded product for China; this is an amazing product offering for agents and their clients and many more travel ideas are available on the web as well."

Goway's most popular air-land inclusive tour to Asia, China Odyssey is a 12-day program offering travelers the classic sights of China in a comfortable itinerary that can easily be extended to vibrant Hong Kong (to 16 days) and starts at \$2,859 per person double, air-inclusive from the west coast. **Call 800-387-8850; www.Goway.com**

General Tours' Shangri-La Experience in China provides clients with their own private car, driver and expert guide every day for totally customized sightseeing and exploration in Beijing, Xian, and Shanghai. Plus, return each night to the award winning luxury of five-star **Shangri-La Hotels** and exclusively arranged room upgrades and special amenities. The nine-day privately-guided tour including 14 meals, sightseeing and internal flights is priced from \$2,879 per person for land arrangements only. **Call 800-221-2216; www.generaltours.com**

Jet About Asia is selling a 14-night independent vacation priced similarly from \$2,879 per person double for its Best of China program that follows the footsteps of ancient emperors through China's Imperial cities. Among the highlights are visits to the Great Wall of China, a walk through the Forbidden City, dining on classical Beijing Duck, a visit to the magnificent Terra Cotta Warriors in Xi'an, a chance to interact with the local tribes in Longsheng, a view of the dramatic formations along the Li River; the famous Jade Buddha Temple and the Yu Garden, a meeting with local villagers in Kunming and a lively acrobatic show. **Call 800-348-8150; www.jetaboutasiavacations.com**

Asia Journeys' 10-day China Discovery hits the 4 most famous places in China: Beijing, Shanghai, Guilin and Xi'an. Visit some of the most important cultural sites in the world: the Great Wall, The Forbidden City, The Terra-Cotta Warriors and the most beautiful scenery in the world near Guilin along with exciting Shanghai. The air-inclusive price starts from \$3,547 per person double with airport taxes and fuel surcharges included. However, Asia Journeys' executives recommend their 16-day Classic Yangtze River Cruise (downstream) for a one-time only trip to China. Participants visit Beijing, with its Great Wall and Forbidden City; Xi'an and its Warriors; Guilin and the Yangtze River with its incredible scenery; and exciting Shanghai and Hong Kong. The air-inclusive program is priced from \$4,986 per person double with airport taxes and fuel surcharges included. **Call 800-796-8503; www.asia-journeys.com**

For consolidator airfares and tour packages to China see page 97 of the Listings Section

BEST BUYS

\$2715 CHINA Orient Flexi-Pax Tours and Victoria Cruises have assembled a comprehensive Yangtze River Voyage, which features three-night cruises aboard the five-star Victoria Anna or Victoria Katarina as well as eight nights of world-class hotel accommodations, including the magnificent Shangri-La Golden Flower in Xi'an and deluxe Regent properties in Beijing and Shanghai. The 11-night package also features flights and airport transfers within China, 27 meals, intriguing sightseeing including some of China's hidden gems with an experienced English-speaking guide, and the USTOA \$1 Million Travelers Assistance Program. The deluxe Yangtze River Voyage is priced from \$2,715 per person, based on double occupancy, with departures now through March 2009. International airfare is not included, but can be purchased from Orient Flexi-Pax Tours based on the lowest possible rate at the time of booking.

Call 800-545-5540 or visit www.orientflexipax.com



\$1799 CHINA Asia Classic Tours sells an 11-day Super Value Best of China program priced from \$1,799 with guaranteed departures with a minimum of two passengers. Participants will visit Beijing, Xi'an, Shanghai and Suzhou. While its 13-day Super Value China Splendor priced from \$2,099 adds Guilin to the mix. And finally, its 15-day program offers a quick view of China's classical sights as well as spectacular view of Mt. Fuji and a visit to Kasuga Shrine in Japan. Prices start at \$3,099 per person double. Prices reflect land-only arrangements; air-inclusive pricing from Los Angeles and New York is available.

Call 800-717-7752; www.asiaclassictours.com

\$3200 NEW ZEALAND Othauna Lodge will offer a South Island themed, three-night "Gour-May" cooking and wine tasting package that will highlight seasonal New Zealand dishes (many inspired from freshly picked produce from the Lodge's large organic gardens) along with a chauffeured tour of four nearby Waipara wineries.

Executive Chef Jimmy McIntyre, who oversees the kitchen of Othauna along with its accompanying henhouse, piggery, nut and fruit orchard and vegetable garden, conducts the cooking class. Available through August 31, 2008, the three-night package will also include daily breakfast, evening cocktails and canapés along with a five-course degustation dinner paired with New Zealand wines. Guests will be upgraded to a master suite based on availability; the cost is about \$3,200. One lunch will be served at the Pegasus Bay winery restaurant.

Call 011-64 3 329 6333; E-mail at enquiries@otahuna.co.nz; www.otahuna.co.nz

IN THE NEWS

Blue Lagoon's 20% Deal

Blue Lagoon is taking 20 percent off all cruises. Agents need only mention booking code NA20%OFFALL to qualify their clients for the discount on any Blue Lagoon Cruise through June 30, 2008 when travel is completed by March 31, 2009. Conditions do apply however, namely that normal contract rates apply; the offer applies to all cruises departing by March 31, 2009; the offer excludes Sky Deck on Mystique Princess, Cruise in Luxury Dive in Paradise Cruises and Historical & Cultural Cruise. Confirmations will be provided at the time of booking subject to availability at time of request. And, finally, the offer may not be sold in conjunction with any other offer available in market. Standard cancellation & no show policies apply as per current wholesale contracts.

Booking code: 'NA20%OFFALL' must be quoted at time of reservation for offers above to be valid. Vouchers must also have the 'NA20%OFFALL' code stated. **E-mail Marie@bluelagoonus.com; or www.bluelagooncruises.com**

Incredible India's Incredible Ambitions

Incredible Vacations India plans to bring 1,000 American travel agents to India in an effort to sell the destination. Basic itineraries cover the Golden Triangle and the Green Triangle of Kerala: including the Taj Mahal, wildlife sanctuaries in Ranthambore and Periyar, Jaipur and Kochi, and shopping in Mumbai and Delhi.

Tours depart Thursdays and are fully booked through August; but bookings are being accepted for Sept. 2008. Contact Ram Chopra, **212 695-1005; E-mail Ram-chopra@incrediblevacationsindia.com**

Hainan Airlines' Big Year

Founded in 1993, **Hainan Airlines (HU)** currently is the fourth-largest carrier in China and the largest non-government-owned airline in China. Hainan Airlines carries more than 14 million passengers annually.

Currently Hainan Airlines operates flights to more than 60 domestic and international cities, including the capitals of every Chinese province. Hainan Airlines' international flights include Budapest, Brussels, Osaka and St. Petersburg.

A member of ARC, Hainan Airlines currently accepts the following forms of payment – Visa, Mastercard, and Diner's Club. To better serve the North American passengers, Hainan Airlines have sales and reservations offices in seven locations across the USA and Canada and agreements with airlines partners such as Alaska Airlines and American Airlines to offer competitive fares and connections from points throughout the USA and Canada.

The toll-free North American reservation and information numbers link agents to both native English and Chinese speakers to assist them with bookings.

Call 888-688-8813, for English and call 888-688-8876 for Chinese speakers. Visit www.hnair.com/us

SPAS

The Ultimate Reward for the Hard at Work



Recognized as the voice of the spa industry, the **International SPA Association (ISPA)** recently reported its membership is now comprised of more than 3,000 health and wellness facilities in 75 countries. ISPA is seen as a guiding light to growing this industry, a portion of which can be profitable to agents willing and able to learn more about selling spa vacations to their clients.

As popular as spa experiences have become to tourism and travel, it was only seven years ago that ISPA commissioned the first study of the North American spa industry. Since then, the results have been updated, highlights of which are available online.

Among the key findings is the fact that day spas continue to be the largest spa category, and account for about four out of every five spas in the U.S. and, secondly, that resort and hotel spas followed close behind in the number of facilities now in operation.

In terms of volume, agents may want to know that there were about 111 million spa visits made in the U.S. in 2006 with day spas and hotel and resort spas taking a chunk of the action.

The U.S. spa industry generated about \$9.4 billion in gross revenue; at 56% day spas generate the largest share of the revenues followed by the resort/hotel spa segment at 27%. Additionally, the U.S.'s closest neighbor, Canada's spa market counts just under 3,000 spas that produced about \$1.1 billion in revenues.

Among the most important trends for agents to be aware of is that spas are losing the "pampering" image as the industry broadens its consumer appeal.

The dominant component in this trend is that people want to reward themselves for working hard and the other key trend is the continued increase in the number of men visiting spas.

Packaging Rejuvenation

The ISPA research supports the notion that the best part of taking a vacation is the renewed sense of relaxation and freedom one experiences while being away.

U.S.: With this mindset, the 56-room **Lodge & Spa at Cordillera**, a **RockResort** in Edwards, CO, offers guests ways to revitalize and re-energize while on holiday and long after the trip ends with seasonal spa packages.

Among the treatments available are the CranioSacral Therapy, a gentle technique used to assist the body's natural healing mechanisms and diminish the negative effects of stress on the central nervous system; a nutrition consultation with a dietician; a fitness consultation; a personal training session for optimal results; a 50-minute body treatment at the RockResorts Spa and a 50-minute facial at the RockResorts Spa; a healthy breakfast daily.

Call 866-650-ROCK (7625); or visit www.rockresorts.com

Tucked away in the Northeast is a new concept, teen spa programs at the **Spa at Cranwell**, an AAA Four Diamond in the Berkshires, which has developed a new program of treatments for teens.

The Teen Treatment program is based on the increasing popularity of spa services for this age group. New treatments for teens 16 years and older include the Sugar Scrub, a refreshing body scrub, a Teen Facial

specifically designed for younger skin, Citrus Massage concentrating on the back and shoulders, and Personal Teen Training with one of the spa's certified fitness trainers.

A choice of over 25 different 50-minute treatments is now available with the packages. In addition, Spa Stay Package guests may participate in unlimited Fitness Classes during their stay. A wide variety of classes are available -- from yoga and Pilates to water classes and spinning. This new format is built into all Spa Stay Packages, including the one-night Spa Break, the Mother/Daughter and Girlfriend Getaways, as well as the standard two to four-night Packages. **Call 800-272-6935; www.cranwell.com**

Just a shell's throw away from the Atlantic Ocean, **The Spa at Ginn Hammock Beach** on Florida's Palm Coast introduced their newest treatment, which is getting rave reviews from the spa industry. The "La Florida Poulitice Massage" is a full-body treatment which uses a careful blend of organic lavender, ginger, orange peel and white cinnamon to create the ultimate sensual experience. Once heated to 120 degrees, the herbs act as massage tools to alleviate pain and inflammation and loosen tight muscles.

Visit www.hammockbeach.com

The deluxe three-level **Mandarin Oriental Spa** in Miami spa treatments blend elements of Chinese, Ayurvedic, European, Balinese and Thai cultures. The "Earth in Motion" Treatment begins with a foot soak in floral water followed by a body massage using "Oriental Body Oil" for tension.

The "Lifestyle Journey" programs Were developed as three and seven-

night packages that include accommodations in a Spa Lifestyle Room, a wellness-themed guest room specifically designed for the healthy-minded guests looking for amenities.

An air purification system, in-room fitness program, personal lifestyle consultant and spa cuisine offerings provide a balanced, stress-free environment among other considerations.

Visit www.mandarinoriental.com

EUROPE: The long-awaited unveiling of a landmark property, **The Gleneagles Hotel** in Scotland is further enhanced with the brand new spa--the Spa at Gleneagles by ESPA."

With 20 treatment rooms plus ESPA therapies, the spa is set in 5,630 square feet of space. 'Heat Experiences' feature an ice foundation with sauna and steam, 'Holding Space' is a pre-treatment room with a glass walled fountain and a full range of treatment packages for men and girls from 6-12 and 12-16. **Call 866-46308734; www.gleneagles.com**

CARIBBEAN: The recently opened **Verandah Resort & Spa**, an eco-friendly resort set along Antigua's secluded northeast coast, boasts a long list of hedonistic and rejuvenating treatments include a caviar and pearl anti-aging facial, a detoxifying seaweed wrap, and a green coffee wrap to reduce cellulite.

The resort also features hiking trails, two reef-sheltered beaches for swimming and non-motorized water sports such as kayaking, windsurfing, and snorkeling and the island's largest free-form swimming pool.

Its 200 villa-style suites feature the resort's glorious namesake verandahs with incredible views of the sea,

Call 800-345-0356; or visit www.verandahresortandspa.com

Half Moon in Rose Hall, Jamaica recently opened the **Fern Tree Spa** along with six spas. Drawing on Jamaica's lush landscape and centuries-old healing The spa elder, unique to Fern Tree Spa, is the wellness leader for guests to the spa. The spa elder is versed in the art of holistic healing. Spa menus include basic spa and healing treatments, and treatments for men, teenagers and kids.

The new six signature beachfront spa

suites provide all the comforts found in a traditional hotel suite along with the services of a personal spa.

Each spa suite features a private patio overlooking the Caribbean with outdoor soaking tub and shower and a personal studio that can be used for private en-suite treatments, personal fitness or yoga plus an organic spa refreshment bar and spa bath bar.

Call 800-626-0592; or visit www.halfmoon.com

Excellence Resorts premiered the newest element of its world-class brand, the **Miilé Spa in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic; Riviera Cancun, Mexico; and Playa Mujeres, Mexico.**

The new concept was developed to give guests the sensation of residing on their own private island, where they can retreat in an oasis and depart with a sense of renewal and well-being.

Miilé Spa features couple suites that feature a private steamroom, hydrotherapy treatment baths, massage suite and a secluded relaxation terrace with ocean views; the Silk Suites are specially designed for Asian spa techniques such as shiatsu and reiki; heated relaxation beds that submerge guests in warmth following the hydrotherapy circuit; and a Caldarium that detoxifies and opens pores.

Visit www.excellence-resorts.com

The first **Hyatt Pure** spa in the Caribbean, **Spa Esencia** is open at the **Hyatt Regency Trinidad**. The hotel offers a spa experience that maintains the festive environment of Trinidad. Said Spa Director Serena Rogers, and a team from the spa extensively toured the island with translators and local extinct cultures, natural available materials and medicinal influences from South American, Native Caribbean and African cultures that are now a part of the Trinidad & Tobago population.

When designing the treatments, Spa Esencia's creators also researched and considered different skin tones and textures to effectively cater to the many races and cultures represented in the local people on-island. **Call 868-821-6500; www.trinidad.hyatt.com**

ASIA: **Langham Hotels International** officially opened its first property under a management contract, **Langham Place, Eco Resort + Spa** marking

the first of six scheduled openings in the next 18 months. Located on the Island of Koh Lanta, in Krabi province, Southern Thailand, **Langham Place Eco Resort + Spa** is a five-star resort designed to coexist with awe-inspiring natural landscapes. The 185 rooms and villas extend from the beach up the hillside overlooking Klong Tob Bay.

To acquaint themselves with the property travel agents can enjoy up to three nights free for just the price of breakfast by booking through their GDS systems.

Visit www.langhamhotels.com

Why Sell Spa Vacations?

Spas, once sold only to the well-to-do, are becoming more accessible to people of all budgets and are cropping up everywhere -- in airports, doctors' offices, on television commercials and day spas are on the rise in cities around the world. For agents, spas represent an untapped market -- one in five Americans have already visited a spa, which means it is on their radar screens, if not yet in their vacation plans.

The numbers tell the real story -- it is the fourth largest leisure industry in the United States, generating \$11.2 billion in annual revenues, have shown up in more than 12,000 locations, counting 136 million visits. Spas clearly have something to offer for everyone beyond a Swedish massage.

Top athletes understand the positive effects of spa treatments on sore muscles.

Men make up more than a quarter of spa clients.

Cancer patients are finding a much-needed place for reprieve at spas.

Families are enjoying spas together as quality time to bond and relax. [Think mothers and daughters, sisters.]

Teens are going in groups and learning lifestyle lessons on skin care and proper nutrition.

Man's best friend has even clawed his and her way into spas.

BEST BUYS

\$1995 MEXICO

El Dorado Maroma, A Beachfront Resort, by Karisma, a Gourmet Inclusive® property located along the Riviera Maya, Mexico, and LUXE Destination Events, a boutique consulting firm and travel agency specializing in luxury destination events in the Caribbean and Mexico, invites travelers on an exclusive photo retreat from August 15 – 19, 2008.

During this learning vacation, famed photographer and founder of The Academy of Photo Arts (APA) Studios, Richard Emmanuel, will host intimate photography courses, followed by excursions to some of the Riviera Maya's historical sites such as nearby jungle; Chichén Itzá, one of the Seven Wonders of the World; and the archeological sites at Tulum, an ancient Mayan city perched on a bluff over the Caribbean Sea where participants will put their newly acquired skills to use. Rates for the LUXE APA Photo Retreat at El Dorado Maroma, A Beachfront Resort, by Karisma begin at \$1,995 per person for a four-night stay in a Swim-Up Jacuzzi Suite including the Gourmet Inclusive experience in a cash-free environment.

Call 888-LUXE933; visit : LUXEdestinationevents.com or Email: photoretreat@LUXEdestinationevents.com

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\$199 MEXICO

The CasaMagna Marriott Cancun Resort, which prides itself on being a top-rated family vacation option in the Mexican Caribbean, now has another reason for families to experience this property. Just recently, the CasaMagna Marriott Cancun Resort's Kids Club debuted the Kids Cocina, consisting of organized children's cooking classes featuring fun Mexican dishes prepared with trans fat free items. The Kids Cocina at the CasaMagna Marriott Cancun Resort offers all children enrolled at the property's Kids Club the chance to become chefs for a day and learn how to cook authentic and tasty Mexican dishes. For \$25 per child, guests between four and 12 years of age enjoy an extensive program including swimming, Spanish lessons, paint workshops, kite-making and Pinata making. The Kids Club is open daily. Those families interested to visit the CasaMagna Marriott Cancun Resort should consider booking the Escape! Family Package, valid through October 31, 2008. Included are breakfast for two adults and two children, pizza and movie for one night, and a milk and cookies nightly turndown. Rates start at \$199 - \$249 per room, per night doubles. Call 888-727-2347; visit www.jwmarriottcancun.com / www.casamagnacancun.com

\$129 FLORIDA

Located in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, PGA National Resort & Spa offers a complete resort experience with a full array of amenities and services that speaks to a wide range of interests and agendas. A sweeping multi-million dollar renovation has resulted in the "re-birth" of the legendary golf resort. Included in the package are a team building golf clinic or Thai Chi class, morning and afternoon breaks or daily Continental breakfast, 15% AV discount, one upgrade for every 15 rooms booked on peak night, 5% additional discount on master account for groups with Sunday peak arrivals. Offer good for meetings through September.

Call 877- 553-4669; E-mail sales@pgaresort.com; www.pgaresort.com

\$465 CONNECTICUT

The Mohegan Sun is offering two one-night packages for golf aficionados valid through Sept. 30, 2008. Nestled in the rolling hills of southeastern Connecticut, the Mohegan Sun Country Club at Pautipaug, is a private 18-hole championship golf course. The Tee and Coffee package, priced at \$449 based on double occupancy, includes accommodations, golf for two, coffee and muffin for two at Imus Ranch Coffee and a 20% discount on apparel at The Golf Shop located within The Shops at Mohegan Sun. Mention booking code PTPP1 The Putt and Pamper package, which costs \$465 based on double occupancy covers a one night stay at Mohegan Sun, golf for two at Mohegan Sun Country Club at Pautipaug (including transportation to the course, cart, yardage book, and greens fees), or two 50-minute massage treatments at Elemis Spa including complete spa access for two, or golf for one and one massage, breakfast for two, and/or 20% off at The Golf Shop located within The Shops at Mohegan Sun. Mention booking code PTPP2

Call 888-777-7922; www.mohegansun.com

Luxury on the High Silversea

by Jonathan Siskin

Silversea's four deluxe all-suite ships—Silver Cloud, Silver Whisper, Silver Wind and Silver Shadow—feature the sleek dimensions of a private yacht and exude the intimacy and exclusivity of a posh private club. A far cry from mass market mega-ships, the Cloud & Wind carry a maximum of 296 guests while the Whisper & Shadow have space for 282. They especially appeal to a select niche of well heeled, discerning globetrotters accustomed to the finest things in life. 40-60% of Silversea guests are repeaters, and their average age is between 45 and 64 with yearly incomes of \$200,000+ and household assets of \$2,000,000+. Cruise-only fares starting at \$4,500 per person for a one week cruise and \$8,200 for a two-week cruise.

Fabulous On Board Amenities

Besides an abundance of deluxe amenities and services from all-suite accommodations to gourmet dining and penultimate pampering, another key selling point is Silversea's all-inclusive pricing that entitles guests to several "freebies" not offered by most cruise lines. A special guest favorite is its complimentary drink policy as all wines, champagne and spirits served throughout the cruise are provided courtesy of Silversea. Besides the chilled bottle of champagne that awaits every guest upon arrival, the suite's mini-refrigerator is stocked with an assortment of complimentary beverages replenished daily. There is also 24-hour room service in-suite dining and full breakfasts delivered to their suite at no charge. Other complimentary extras include roundtrip transportation from the pier to the heart of town in many ports of call and unique shore side events on select sailings such as dinner in the Namibian desert and a traditional evening of Vietnamese cuisine in Ho Chi Minh City. Guests also are not expected to leave tips which are included in the cruise fare.

Foodies Rejoice

Foodie clients may be interested in reserving space on one of the upcoming Viking Cooking School theme cruises which have been expanded to 12 voyages this year on itineraries to the Caribbean, Northern Europe, South America, Africa and the South Pacific. Each theme cruise is hosted by Viking chefs who instruct guests on cooking techniques and features gastronomic specialties from destinations on the itinerary such as the fragrant spices of Arabia and the Far East, the roasted chiles of Mexico and the wine-inspired sauces of Bordeaux. All Silversea ships are equipped with a culinary theater equipped with state-of-the art Viking stoves, microwaves, cookward, cutlery and countertop appliances



Venice, Italy.

plus a large rear projection screen so guests can easily view the various cooking techniques.

Lush Inventory

Clients interested in booking a Silversea cruise can choose from 140 itineraries worldwide ranging from 7 to 92 days sailing to more than 300 ports in 108 countries. Mediterranean itineraries are currently the favorite of UK clients, and the most popular seven-day cruises include Barcelona to Rome, Rome to Monte Carlo, Venice to Athens, and Athens to Istanbul. While the Mediterranean is strong, voyages to the Middle East are rapidly rising in demand. It's advisable to book sooner rather than later since clients who reserve space well in advance of sailing date (more than six months out) qualify for early booking discounts of 15-35%.

New Ships on the Way

Due to steadily rising demand, Silversea is adding two new ships—Prince Albert II and Silver Spirit—to its fleet over the next two years. Slated to debut in Monaco this month, the 132-passenger Prince Albert is the first Silversea ship designed specifically for expedition cruising to far-flung destinations from the Arctic to Antarctica. While at sea guests will enjoy the same deluxe amenities available on Silversea's four other ships including a full-service spa, beauty salon, ship wide Internet access, sauna, two whirlpools and complimentary wines, champagne and spirits. It will also have Silversea's signature personalized service with a crew to guest ration of 1 to 1.

Among the most intriguing itineraries scheduled for its inaugural season are an 18 day "Greenland Exploration" cruise from Reykjavik, Iceland to St. John's, Newfoundland departing July 30; a 22-day "Journey to South America" from Acapulco, Mexico to Santiago Chile departing October 12; and a 16-day "Explorer's Antarctica" cruise departing from Ushuaia, Argentina on Nov. 14.

Scheduled to debut in late 2009, the 36,000 ton Spirit is the largest Silversea ship ever built with a maximum capacity of 540 guests and 270 ocean view suites (all but 12 suites will have verandas) There will be several public areas not found on its other ships including a Lobby Bar styled along the lines of a deluxe European boutique hotel, an enlarged spa with an expanded menu of treatments, a supper club serving gourmet cuisine and an Asian restaurant.

With the addition of these two newbuilds, Silversea's overall fleet capacity will increase 40% from 1,346 berths to 1,896 berths.

For additional information, visit www.silversea.com

LA's Culture Vultures with a Sense of Humor

Los Angeles is known to beat at the pace of a very different drummer and this season is no exception. From the Esotouric Tours that take visitors on "Haunts of a Dirty Old Man: Charles Bukowski's L.A." (how dirty can it be if you are doing this from a motorcoach) to L.A.'s new indoor skydiving attraction. GQ recently did an article about Robert Downey Jr. who wouldn't conduct the interview with the journalist unless they did it at Universal CityWalk's new wind tunnel, so this is obviously a new must for visitors too.

When the Ceiling is the Limit

iFLY Hollywood at Universal CityWalk Hollywood (Hollywood) takes extreme to new heights with the opening of iFLY Hollywood, LA's first ever indoor skydiving wind tunnel. Housed in the world's tallest and most technologically advanced indoor wind tunnel, thrill-seekers enjoy a close approximation of a true skydiving experience as they are suspended in mid-air at heights of up to 30 feet and wind speeds of more than 125 miles-per-hour, with 360-degree views of CityWalk's pedestrian promenade. The experience replicates skydiving by using two colossal electric fans (the equivalent of more than 800 horsepower), to give guests of all ages an authentic and intense free-fall sensation. Certified skydiving instructors provide individualized training prior to each skydiving adventure and guests don authentic skydiving gear. Guests receive a Certificate of Completion following their flight. Single flight packages cost \$39.95. Group rates are available. www.iflyhollywood.com. www.citywalkhollywood.com

Talk of the Town

Of course, the talk of the town moving forward in LA is going to The Simpsons Ride at Universal Studios Hollywood (opening May 17):

"The Simpsons Ride" is a new mega attraction at Universal Studios



Hollywood based on the critically acclaimed TV series and movie, "The Simpsons." "The Simpsons Ride" will take guests to a side of Springfield previously unexplored as they enter "Krustyland," a new fantasy theme park within the theme park, created by the show's cantankerous Krusty the Clown. In this fully immersive experience, guests will be rocketed along with Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa and Maggie Simpson on "Krusty's Thrilltacular Roller Coaster," where they'll rip roar at faster than lightning speeds on a hysterical, almost unimaginable adventure. "The Simpsons Ride" is an unprecedented collaboration between Universal Parks & Resorts and "The Simpsons" creators, Executive Producer Matt Groening and Executive Producer James L. Brooks. "The Simpsons Ride" features the show's classic humor with 29 popular Springfield residents all voiced by the original talent, including Hank Azaria, Dan Castellaneta, Nancy Cartwright, Julie Kavner and Yeardley Smith.

Visit www.universalstudios.com

Stalking a Dirty Old Man

Back in March, the Cultural Heritage Commission recommended the L.A. City Council to name the longtime East Hollywood home of poet and novelist Charles Bukowski as an official Historic-Cultural monument. This protects the modest, now-vacant bungalow court from demolition and ensures future generations of fans will be able to visit the site where a disgruntled 50-something postal worker made the leap to international celebrated writer.

Richard Schave, one of the organizers

of the preservation campaign, hosts a very special memorial edition of the Esotouric bus tour "Haunts of a Dirty Old Man: Charles Bukowski's L.A." on the anniversary of Buk's 1994 death. This is a chance for Bukowski lovers to come together to celebrate the landmarking, which was dogged by false accusations of Nazism from the building's owners, but which garnered widespread support from the preservation and literary communities and city officials.

Esotouric has made its name with true crime bus tours (Black Dahlia, Pasadena Confidential) and explorations of literary L.A. (Raymond Chandler, John Fante, James M. Cain). Here they turn their creative attentions to Bukowski, the prolific poet, novelist and screenwriter whose rough-hewn tales of boozing, wild women and rotten jobs never obscure the deep vein of sweetness and hope that runs through all his work.

"Haunts of a Dirty Old Man" spans Bukowski's personal city, from Skid Row to once-genteel Crown Hill, favorite bars and liquor stores, "Barfly" locations to the downtown library, where he discovered his "God," novelist John Fante. German born, Bukowski spent most of his life in L.A., working for the US Postal Service, as "Notes of a Dirty Old Man" columnist for the underground press and writing the screenplay for the autobiographical "Barfly." The city and its characters are everywhere in the work, so this tour celebrates the artist within his city with visits to places that were important to him.

Upcoming Esotouric bus tour schedule include: Sat., June 14- Vroman's - The Birth of Noir: James M. Cain's SoCal Nightmare; Sat., Aug. 9- Vroman's Bookstore - Charles Bukowski's LA; Sat., Oct. 11 Vroman's Bookstore - Raymond Chandler's LA. Visit www.esotouric.com

For more information on L.A., visit www.discoverLosAngeles.com

For consolidator airfares and tour packages to the US see page 85 of the Listings Section

BEST BUYS

FAMILY GETAWAYS IN HAWAII

Napili Kai Beach Resort, a deluxe resort situated on 10 beachfront acres on Maui's western shore, is offering a variety of specials during its "Value Seasons" in 2008.

The resort's 2008 Whale Watcher's package requires a five-night minimum stay, with every fifth night free, and is available for Ocean View Hotel Rooms, Ocean View Studios (excluding Family Studios), Beachfront and Ocean Front Studios, and Ocean View and Oceanfront One-Bedroom Suites. The Whale Watcher's package is offered for the Spring Value Season through June 13.

Napili Kai's Fifth Night Free special is available for Ocean View Hotel Rooms, Ocean View Studios (excluding Family Studios), Beachfront and Oceanfront Studios, and selected One-Bedroom Suites. Value Season rack rates for these units range from \$270 to \$460 per night. The Fifth Night Free offer may not be combined with any other specials, packages, discounted rates, or group rates. It is offered during both the Spring and Fall Value Seasons.

Call 800-367-5030; E-mail stay@napilikai.com; www.napilikai.com

Hilton Family Hawaii introduced the Win a Million Vacation Giveaway, offering travel agents an opportunity to win one million Hilton HHonors bonus points plus Hawaiian vacations for two for bookings made at its six properties on Oahu, Maui and Kauai. Hilton HHonors points can be used for travel, accommodations, entertainment and shopping. Hilton HHonors recently introduced its No Blackout Dates policy based on availability of standard rooms. Agents register online and answer a series of questions about Hilton Family Hawaii and Continental Airlines. All licensed IATA or ARC travel agents who are U. S. residents and are 18 or older are eligible to enter before the July 6 deadline, with no purchase necessary to enter.

Visit www.hiltonfamilyhawaii.com/winamillion

The Doubletree Alana-Waikiki is offering the Perfect Family Vacation Package (code PFV), with a one-bedroom suite, \$75 dining credit and \$40 Power Cards to use at Dave & Busters with a three-night booking at daily rates starting at \$240 per night. The Sweet Romance Getaway (code ROM) includes breakfast in bed and one bottle of sparkling wine delivered to the room upon check-in. Daily rate starts at \$194. The Dream Deal (code DDL) includes breakfast for two adults and two children starting at \$199.

Call 800-559-4201; www.doubletree.com

Resortquest Hawaii is offering KeikiQuest Kids Club for children ages 5 through 12 staying at any of ResortQuest Hawaii's eight properties in Waikiki from June 15 to Aug. 23. The club offers daytime activities for children and educates youngsters about Hawaii's culture and natural history. The program will be housed in a specially designated KeikiQuest Kids Club room at the ResortQuest Waikiki Beach Hotel. Daily programs run from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and include lunch and a snack as a part of the \$50 daily price per child.

Call 866-774-2924; www.resortquest.com

IN THE NEWS

Riding the Big Cat

The CAT, a high-speed catamaran ferry operating between Maine and Nova Scotia, can transport up to 750 passengers and up to 240 cars, motorcoaches, RVs and motorcycles. On board features include movie theaters, a casino, dining and duty-free shopping. The CAT connects Maine and Nova Scotia in a fraction of the time required to drive. Passports are not required for US and Canadian citizens. All passengers must carry a government-issued photo I.D. and proof of residency, such as a birth certificate.

Through July 13 and September 1 - October 14, the ship departs from Bar Harbor, Maine four times per week (Monday through Thursday) and Portland three times per week (Friday through Sunday). From July 14 through August 31, the ship departs Bar Harbor Monday through Wednesday and departs from Portland Thursday through Sunday.

All sailings land in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. Bay Ferries, which operates The CAT, also operates conventional ferries between New Brunswick and Nova Scotia and Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.

Together, the ships can significantly reduce driving times for visitors to Maine and the Maritimes, which are both recognized as among the world's greatest summer destinations. Rates, schedules and vacation packages can be found on The CAT's website,

Visit www.catferry.com

Montreal Just for Laughs and a Deal

Every summer, Montreal comes alive when Just For Laughs -The Montreal International Comedy Festival takes the city by storm, celebrating its 26th year. The outdoor Festival site in the heart of downtown Montreal, presents over 1,200 wildly colorful street performances featuring artists from more than 19 countries, in a carnival atmosphere, as well as a slew of activities for the whole family, including a weekend dedicated to Twins...best of all...its FREE!

Indoors theatres and comedy clubs feature the top names in comedy in a variety of themed and Gala shows. The Festival is the largest and most prestigious event of its kind in the world and has attracted The Daily Show's Jon Stewart, Tool-man Tim Allen, SNL's Tina Fey, the energetic Kelly Ripa, Deal or No Deal's Howie Mandel, Boston Legal's William Shatner and the legendary John Cleese.

The stellar list of Festival alumni also includes Ray Romano, Jerry Seinfeld, Will Ferrell, Dane Cook, Chris Rock, Carl Reiner, Jim Carrey and Drew Carey - to name but a few of the headlining performers.

The Festival has put together numerous packages to provide the ultimate comedy festival experience. Festival packages are available from one evening stays to week-long trips, starting at \$280 per person including breakfast and access to show tickets and are based on double occupancy.

Call 888 244-3155 ext. 2; E-mail tourism@hahaha.com; www.hahaha.com/packages

Marriott's Growth Spurt Continues

By Maria Lisella

Marriott counts more than 3,000 hotels with 19 brands in 69 countries in its vast inventory. On the heels of this interview, Marriott International Inc. announced plans to more than double its hotels in the Middle East by boosting its Middle East properties from 26 to 65 by 2011. The agreements include one for a Marriott resort in Marsa Alam, Egypt, as well as plans for a Courtyard hotel and a Renaissance hotel in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Marriott's Middle East brands include Ritz-Carlton, JW Marriott Hotels & Resorts, Marriott Hotels & Resorts, Renaissance Hotels & Resorts, Courtyard by Marriott and Marriott Executive Apartments.

In the meantime, JF interviewed Fred Miller (right), Vice President, Travel Industry Relations also known as the voice and face of Marriott to the travel industry as he is about to retire. A 40-year veteran in the lodging industry, Miller joined Marriott International in early 1997 as part of the company's acquisition of the Renaissance Hotel Group. He is responsible for setting the strategy and direction of Marriott's wholesale and retail travel agency programs. He will offer his vast experience and perspective as a consultant while Marriott plans to keep his programs in place. With 26 million members enrolled in Marriott Rewards Program, the firm boasts great brand loyalty.

JF: What is the proportion between leisure and business markets?

Miller: On the transient or FIT side, we are about 35% leisure, 45% business, 20% both. There are three basic types of lodging customers: Group (both leisure tour groups and business groups such as meetings), permanents such as airline crews or extended stay guests and transient or FIT (business travelers, vacationers, or other leisure guests not traveling in a group). Groups and meetings comprise about 35% of our total rooms sales.

We have a strategy for each segment with specific messages. With 19 brands and our distribution, we have a lodging solution for everyone.

JF: What is the price range of your vast inventory?

Miller: We are primarily a hotel management company and own very little

real estate. Our blended average rate is about \$145.

JF: What percentage of Marriott's reservations originate with agents?

Miller: Approximately 30% of our transient business is from travel agents and about 8% from wholesalers.

JF: What portion originate with individual agents or consortia?

Miller: Most of our business comes from agencies that are members of consortia. Independents constitute less than 10% of our business.

JF: Since agents are responsible for about a third of your sales, do you project using that outlet less in the coming years or do you think this portion of agent sales is necessary to Marriott's revenue?

Miller: Marriott wants the customer to buy our hotels through any distribution channel they wish. We do not encourage channel shifting by offering lower rates (such as web only rates), more inventory in some channels over others, or other incentives. If the customer goes through a travel agent – great; if they go to a web site or a wholesaler – fine; and, if they come directly to us, that is their decision.

JF: Will you be posting any agent incentives to be sure agents book it and take a closer look at it?

Miller: We encourage travel agents to complete the Marriott Hotel Excellence! training program and their travel agencies to become a Marriott Preferred Travel Agency so they will be eligible for our \$49-\$89 Fam-Tastic rates. Currently our 130,000 agents that have completed the course also gain access to promotions, are the first to hear about specials, receive a monthly newsletter, they are invited to



exclusive parties and gatherings, opportunities to network, at industry trade shows. Additionally, they learn how to more effectively sell hotels; not just Marriott brands, but all hotels.

JF: The Fam-Tastic rates are great for agents, but do you have anything in place that would encourage them to sell more volume of Marriott?

Miller: We do not offer point of sale incentives except for special promotions at given destinations. Broad point of sale promotions are risky because they encourage travel agents to bypass their corporate accounts' wishes or corporate travel programs for the sake of earning the incentive and disturbing the corporate account thus losing the business in the long term.

JF: How many agents would you like to see in the program?

Miller: Every one of them!!!

JF: What is the guest to staff ratio?

Miller: It depends on the brand and market mix. For example, the Fairfield brand maintains a ratio of about one employee per three guests, while the Bulgary and Ritz Carlton brands boast at least one to one.

JF: Will online bookings become a major source of income do you think, and if so, which online services do you plan to use or do you already have agreements in place to that effect?

Miller: Marriott.com is our largest producer. Expedia, Travelocity, Orbitz, and other travel booking sites contribute as well. All eChannels contribute about 15% of our total transient business.

For more information on the Marriott Hotel Excellence! program, visit www.hotelexcellence.marriott.com



Hariworld Upgrades Technology

For over 40 years Hariworld Travel has been catering to the travel community of North America, offering more seats on more airlines to more destinations at more competitive fares. From a modest beginning in Toronto, Canada, in 1968, Hariworld has blossomed into one of the country's elite, most influential and respected consolidators.

Hariworld Travel, headquartered in New York, has branch offices in Atlanta, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles and San Francisco all of which are ARC approved. Their office in New Delhi, India is now IATA approved. New branches in New Jersey, Washington and Boston are in the planning stages.

Our Wholesale activity is generated through some 3,500 sub-agents.

Hariworld is currently in the process of launching a state of the art Website to generate greater efficiencies to our operation. The Website will represent a premier solution for product distribution and reservation processing that will present products consistently to a wider spectrum of users.

By consolidating all contractual information to one database, Hariworld will be able to reduce the high cost associated with multiple data input.

The site will also provide an Internet based solution to Travel Agents allowing them to complete their transactions independently.

Visit www.hariworld.com

ASTA Reports on IDE in Lyon

ASTA, the world's largest travel trade reported the success of its third annual International Destination Expo (IDE) in Lyon, France April 12-16. For five days, nearly 1,000 travel professionals from 47 countries, gathered to learn about the culture, attractions and travel business of the city often referred to as "the gateway to Europe."

IDE-Lyon offered travel agents a unique opportunity to meet one-on-one with more than 110 supplier companies (totaling 136 booths) that exhibited at the Lyon Convention Center. "ASTA's IDE is the only industry event dedicated to destination training," said Cheryl Hudak, CTC, ASTA president and CEO. "Attendees have had the chance to experience for themselves the beauty of Lyon and the Rhone-Alps region and discover the nuances that set this region apart Meeting one on one with regional suppliers, travel agents now will return home empowered to sell this unique destination. I have no doubt this lovely city will soon be on everyone's must-see list."

The trade show hosted suppliers representing regions of France and Sun City, South Africa, the home of IDE 2009-27 countries in all, an increase of more than 25 percent from the previous year.

Visit www.asta.org

Rail Europe Appoints Chief Officers

Rail Europe appointed two new Chief Officers. The White Plains-based subsidiary of the French National Railroads (SNCF) and Swiss Federal Railways (SBB) announced Duncan Still as Chief Commercial Officer and Zine Belhonchet as Chief Financial Officer. Under the direction of Frédéric Langlois, President and CEO of Rail Europe, the company is aiming for another banner year in sales. Langlois said "The timing of the new appointments, as we enter our second quarter, is perfect, as RE's revenues in the first quarter were running 4% ahead of last year."

Duncan Still joined Rail Europe in 1997 as Vice President of HR, Legal Affairs and Administration and in 2003, was appointed Chief Financial Officer. Formerly he held management positions in Finance, Operations and Customer Service at British Rail in the UK and at BritRail Travel International, Inc. in New York.

Zine Belhonchet joined Rail Europe in 1997 as Activity and Budget Controller. He became Director of Finance in 2004 and was appointed Vice President of Strategic Planning in 2007. Previous to his employment at Rail Europe, Belhonchet was Controller for the French subsidiary of Welch Allyn based outside Paris.

For information on Rail Europe's wide product range call 888-382-7245; <http://agent.raileurope.com>

Collette Tiptoes into the Green

In conjunction with the celebration of Arbor Day, Collette Vacations has announced the launch of its newest initiative, Project Green and Blue. The program is Collette's latest step in reducing its carbon footprint and environmental impact. The domestic tour operator's initiative is aimed at ensuring Collette's worldwide offices are operating as "green" as possible on a day-to-day basis.

"Everyone needs to take responsibility for the impact they have on our environment," said John Galvin, CFO. "We want to do everything we possibly can to leave the world a better place as a result of our being here."

Project Green and Blue is aimed at doing just that. The initiative's first step was a contribution to the Arbor Day Foundation for the planting of 519 trees, one in honor of each of Collette's employees. Currently, Collette is also working on the design and construction of the new Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) certified building for their office in Canada. The building, to be completed by April 2009, will include a geothermal heating system to reduce the office's reliance on fossil fuels for heat.

Visit: www.collettevacations.com



Travelsavers to Agents: M.Y.O.B.

TRAVELSAVERS has launched a turnkey marketing solution called M.Y.O.B. (Market Your Own Business). The program integrates online and offline marketing initiatives to build a dynamic presence for its agencies in their chosen markets. M.Y.O.B. includes website development, direct response e-marketing, a customer loyalty program, and the My Marketplace "virtual community." My Marketplace is a brand new virtual community housed on the Agent Extranet, offering everything agents need to promote their businesses. At the Promotion Corner, agents can find professionally designed flyers that feature exclusive preferred supplier offers, which are automatically customized with the agencies' contact information. At The Print Shop, graphic design services are available, including high-quality business cards, stationery, and logos. For items created through the Promotion Corner or Print Shop, agents can link directly to the Office Dept to have them printed. "My Marketplace is a very powerful tool for our agencies," said Nicole Mazza, Chief Marketing Officer for TRAVELSAVERS. "Our exclusive consumer promotions will set them apart from the competition, and the flyers can be created so easily with just one click. Furthermore, they can take advantage of our award-winning graphic design studio. We can help them look like they have a Fortune 500 ad agency behind them, at just a fraction of the cost."

Quarterly, web-based trainings for My Marketplace also offer up industry experts delivering hands-on sessions demonstrating how to use M.Y.O.B. to maximize earning potential.

Call 800-366-9895; www.travelsavers.com

The Story Behind Wizie.com Efficiency

Headquartered in Michigan, with branch offices in Halifax, Canada & Gurgaon, India **Wizie.com** is a technology company created to service the travel industry. Wizie provides fare/data filling and management, ticketing solutions on all the major GDS. "Our clients are some of the largest airlines and consolidators across North America, India, Europe and Australia," said Moondeep Aggarwal, COO of Wizie.COM.

"We are a partner for Lufthansa's India Fulfillment Center and exclusively handle reservation and ticketing for all tickets from the USA to India on Lufthansa. We are also one of the certified members for ATPCO & FareExpert (Amadeus) for fare filling and file worldwide fares on ATPCO for AeroSvit Ukrainian Airlines. Among other projects, we have developed various world class internet booking engines (IBEs) for the travel industry, and also have software for automation of ticketing, Fare Comparison Tools etc. We also provide Call Centre and Back Office Solutions to top consolidators in North America," he added. In the world of travel technology, Wizie is considered a pioneer. "We did a full launch in August 2007 and were the first company to offer a Booking Engine that showed available, discounted and published fares available to the travel agent community. For the last eight months, we have 400+ websites using our booking engine and 35,000+ agents using our technology platform." Wizie has a product called Travel Agent Mall, which is where Consolidators from over the world can access their Net Fares and any registered Travel Agents from anywhere in the world can access and book these fares. Visit www.wizie.com

FareBuzz Enhances Hotel Booking Engine

FareBuzz has launched a dynamic web-based Hotel Booking Engine – that allows Travel Professionals to book hotels at net rates in over 100,000 hotel and resort properties. The program offers quality inspected properties in more than 200 countries worldwide with hotels ranging from budget to luxury accommodations. The savings are substantial; 30-40% off retail prices. Agents can log on to the new booking engine at www.farebuzz.com/hotels.

The new Hotel Program provides Travel Professionals with access to Pre-Negotiated Wholesale rates as well as the Best Available rates which have been categorized as "Super Nets" and "Super Savers" respectively. Agents can now add their mark up at the time of booking and receive their commissions within a week of booking. "Travel Agents are tired of waiting for their commissions and want their money fast", says Arnold Walter, President & CEO of Fare Buzz. The new Hotel Program is based on a Powerful, Robust and yet very Simple to use Technology which gives search results in split seconds and instant booking confirmations. Reservations can be made on the website 24/7 or by phone seven days a week.

Call 888-808-4123 or visit www.farebuzz.com

Worldwide Trip Protector, a Wise Move

Travel Insured just launched a new insurance program that includes three new plans with lots of options for agents to sell, and clients to select to fit their needs.

A comprehensive plan (Worldwide Trip Protector) for cruises, tours, resort trips and international travelers; Gold plan for luxury trips; and a new Lite – Lite Expanded plan for family and budget travelers. Cancel for Any Reason, Cancel for Work, Kids are Free and other features are all new.

The program should be very competitive for agents to sell, and affordable for travelers to buy. Earnings opportunities for travel agents begin with high base commissions and can grow with additional sales per formance incentives. Agents can book Worldwide Trip Protector through their agency GDS system or online.

Call 800-243-3174 and ask for a Travel Insured representative, or join a Live Chat on www.travelinsured.com.

How Fast Can You Get a Passport?

Unless your clients can make an appointment at one of the 13 Regional Passport Agencies scattered across the country, it can take three to four weeks to get a passport.

To avoid this scenario, read about **ItsEasy.com**, a passport expeditor that offers same-day service, if the timing is right and if the Passport Agency's allowable quota is not exceeded.

ItsEasy has offices in New York City; Great Neck, Long Island; and now—a new emergency help desk at Kennedy Airport's Terminal 4 for those who don't discover they have a problem until they check in for a flight. The fee for this same-day service is \$300—plus government passport fees. Even faster service is available for an additional fee.

Call 866- 487-3279; or visit www.ItsEasy.com



Menon New Chairman & Managing Director of Air India

India's largest airline, **Air India**, recently appointed **Raghu Menon** to the post of Chairman and Managing Director of the airline, succeeding Mr V.Thulasidas, who retired on March 31.

In his new position, Menon will be responsible for continuing the integration of Air India and Indian Airlines following their merger in 2007, as well as the expansion and upgrading of the carrier's fleet and product offers, and its entry into the Star Alliance.

Menon was previously a Special Secretary and Financial Advisor in the Ministry of Civil Aviation. He brings to Air India extensive experience in the field of aviation, with notable accomplishments that include the liberalization of India's air services agreements with countries around the world, such as U.S. and Canada, the UK, France and Germany, Australia, Netherlands, Canada and other nations.

The move helped to create opportunities for Indian carriers to utilize bilateral rights, leading to an unprecedented growth in the civil aviation sector, estimated at nearly 25% annually, one of the highest in the world.

Menon also worked at the Home, Welfare and Information & Broadcasting Ministries of the Government of India. He was briefly a journalist with The Hitvada newspaper before joining the civil services.

Air India is India's national carrier. The airline has been in operation since 1932 and serves cities throughout India, North America, Europe, Gulf/Mid-East, Africa, and Asia.

Call 800-223-7776; www.airindia.in



Bryan Austin, GM at The Lodge, Vail

Bryan Austin, a 20-year veteran of the hospitality industry, was recently appointed **general manager** of **The Lodge at Vail, A RockResort**. Austin will oversee all operations of the 165-room resort, which has been the cornerstone of Vail Village since 1962.

Austin joins The Lodge at Vail directly from the Wingfield Nevada Group in Las Vegas where he has served as president of resort operations since

March 2006. While there, he was responsible for all resort operations and development of the PGA Village at Coyote Springs, NV, and The Resort at Red Hawk in Sparks, NV.

Previously, Austin spent six years with **The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company**. He also spent 10 years with **The Four Seasons Hotel Company**. During his tenure at Ritz-Carlton, he took part in openings of several hotels including The Ritz-Carlton Bachelor Gulch in Colorado.

Said Stan Brown, executive vice president and chief operating officer,

RockResorts. "His [Austin's] hospitality management and development experience will benefit The Lodge at Vail as the resort takes its luxury guest experience to the next level as part of 'Vail's New Dawn.'"

The 165-room Lodge at Vail, set in Vail Village features mountain and village views. In March, The Lodge opened a new 11,227-square-foot RockResorts Spa. The Lodge at Vail also manages The Austria Haus Hotel, in Vail Village.

Call 877-528-7625; or visit www.rockresorts.com



Tanzania Appoints Mwangunga MP to Head Tourism

The Hon. **Shamsa Selengia Mwangunga** was appointed the **Minister of Natural Resources & Tourism** for the **United Republic of Tanzania** in February 2008.

Prior to this post, Mwangunga served as Deputy Minister of Water for two years, and has been a Member of Parliament, Special Seat, from 2000-2008. Earlier, she held various posts within the public and private sector of Tanzania, including Tanzania-

Swiss Trust Fund Executive Secretary, Business Care Services Projects Manager and Small Industries Development Organization-SIDO Manager Coordinator. The Hon. Minister began her career as a teacher, and later was acknowledged for her highly successful roles as an engineer, champion of women's rights and Member of Parliament.

Hon. Mwangunga has an extensive and impressive educational background spanning the globe. She attained her first college diploma in Education and her initial graduate

degree in Business Communication in Tanzania; a Post Graduate Diploma in Industrial Management from Delft University in Holland, and another post graduate degree in Electrical Engineering from Dar es Salaam Technical College. Mwangunga also has a Diploma in Education with option in Mathematics and Physics, took part in Executive Training in AOTS Tokyo, Japan, and trained in Electrical and Measuring Instruments in St. Albans-Marconi Industries, U. K.

Email: bradfordmktg@aol.com or visit www.tanzaniatouristboard.com

FamiliarizationTrips

EGYPT

Cairo-Aswan-Deluxe 3 nights Nile cruise-Luxor-Alexandria-Cairo

Departures: Nov 29 to Dec 10, 2008; Jan 24 to Feb 4, 2009; April 25 to May 6, 2009. Land Only \$1250. 11 Days / 10 nights. Includes all transfers per itinerary, superior first class hotel accommodations, daily buffet breakfasts and dinners. 3 nights full board in Nile Cruise. All sightseeing tours as specified in day by day itinerary posted online. English speaking tour guide-licensed by the Egypt Ministry of Tourism. Local transportation by Deluxe A/C brand new motorcoach, all admission fees & service charges, all hotels inspections, all local taxes. Spouse/companion welcomed. FloUSA: register at www.flo-usa.com or call 888-435-6872

GREECE & THE GREEK ISLANDS

Athens, Greek Islands & Turkey Cruise

9 Days, 3 Nights Greece & 4 Nights Greek Islands & Turkey Cruise \$1,299 ppdp + Tax. Non-stop flight on Olympic Airlines round-trip from New York JFK to Athens, transfers, 3 nights at a 5-star Athens hotel with breakfast daily, and a 5 day/4 night cruise to the Greek Islands and Turkey. 4* Superior Titania Hotel features 385 contemporary guestrooms and suites. Includes: Athens City Tour to the Acropolis and museums. 5 days / 4 nights Golden Classics Cruise to the Greek Islands and Turkey aboard the M/V Aquamarine of Louis Cruises. Option Tours: Athens By Night Tour (Optional - \$85 per person), Full-Day Tour of Delphi (Optional - \$115 per person; Extend your trip with a 4 Day / 4 Night Classical Greece Land Tour (Optional - \$500 per person) Aegean Mediterranean Cruises & Tours 888-968-0335 aegean@aol.com www.aegeanmedtours.com

INDIA, NEPAL

Delhi, Jaipur, Taj Mahal, Agra, Kathmandu, Patan & Bhaktapur

12 days Luxury Fam: \$2667. Spouse extra supplement. May 30, 2008, June 15th and July 5th. Delhi, Jaipur Pink City, Taj Mahal, Agra, Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur Nepal. Includes, airfares, hotels, daily buffet breakfast, transfers, tours guides and Elephant Ride tour in Jaipur, Taj Mahal by sunrise. Airport and security taxes extra. 4 days Extension to Kashmir, June 9-12, 2008. Himalayan International Tours: 212-564-5164, Fax: 212-564-2188; www.himalayantours.com/India.Fam.tour.html

INDIA

Delhi-Agra-Ranthambore-Jaipur

Air and land all Inclusive fam tours from \$1595. Weekly departure. Includes round-trip air on major carriers from US & Canadian gateways. Two one-week options are offered: The Gold Fam includes Delhi-Agra-Ranthambore-

Jaipur and the Green Fam covers Mumbai-Kochi-Periyar-Kumarakom. Combinations and extensions available. The Tours are leaving every Thursday of the week and are filled up Until August this year and now the booking are being accepted for the month of September 2008 onwards. Please contact Ram Chopra, COO for more information at 212-695-1005 or 888-9CINDIA or email Ramchopra@incrediblevacationsindia.com SANS Incredible Vacations: 212-695-1005 sans@sansincrediblevacations.com

INDIA

Singapore, Delhi (Arrive), Agra, Jaipur, Mandawa, Chennai, Pondichery, Mamallapuram

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TURKEY

Istanbul, Bursa, Ankara, Cappadocia, Antalya, Pamukkale, Ephesus, Canakkale

Oct. 17 to Oct. 31, 2008. 15 Days/13 nights. Land only from \$1695. Land+Air from JFK \$2095. All transfers per itinerary, superior first class hotel accommodations, buffet breakfasts daily and 13 dinners, all sightseeing tours as posted online. English speaking tour guide-licensed by the Turkish NTO. Local transportation by Deluxe A/C new motorcoach, Turkish folk Dance & Belly Dance & Whirling Derwishes shows in Cappadocia, all admission fees & service charges, FLO USA Travel protection Plan (\$200 savings), All taxes. Spouse/companion welcomed. FloUSA: register at www.flo-usa.com or call 888-435-6872

IndustryEvents

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION	CONTACT INFORMATION
May 19-23	33rd Africa Travel Assoc. Congress	Arusha, Tanzania	info@africatraelassociation.org
June 10 / 11	SATA 2008	Portland, OR/Seattle, WA	www.sata-usa.com
June 15-18	Vacation.Com Annual Conference	Las Vegas	www.vacation.com
June 21 to 25	Caribbean Tourism Summit	Washington, DC	www.caribbeantravel.com
July 11-20	15th Annual Dive Fest	East Coast, USA	www.discoverdominica.com
Sept. 7-9	The Trad Show	Orlando, FL	www.thetradeshow.org
Oct 13-16	ITB Asia 2008	Singapore	www.discoveramericapavilion.com
Oct 14 / 15	SATA 2008	Chicago IL/Indianapolis IN	www.sata-usa.com
Oct TBA	ABAV	Rio de Janeiro	www.discoveramericapavilion.com
Nov TBA	CITM 2008	Shanghai, China	www.discoveramericapavilion.com
Nov 10-13	World Travel Market 2008	London, UK	www.discoveramericapavilion.com
Nov 15-19	2008 NTA Annual Convention	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	www.ntaonline.com
Nov 18 / 19	SATA 2008	Atlanta GA, Savannah, GA	www.sata-usa.com

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